

Calif. redistricting measure qualifies for ballot

By The Associated Press

San Diego Union-Tribune, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Friday, June 25, 2010

SACRAMENTO — The California secretary of state has certified a measure for the November ballot that will ask voters if they want to eliminate a state redistricting commission.

Secretary of State Debra Bowen said Thursday there were enough petition signatures for the measure, which would also require populations of all districts for the same office to be the same.

The measure is the tenth to qualify for the Nov. 2 ballot.

They include a measure aiming to legalize marijuana and another that would suspend some air pollution control laws until unemployment levels drop.

Regulators OK voluntary rail yard emission cuts

By Noaki Schwartz- Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle, Modesto Bee and other papers, Friday, June 25, 2010

LOS ANGELES -- State air regulators on Thursday approved a set of voluntary pollution cuts at the dirtiest rail yards in Southern California despite overwhelming objections from residents, local air regulators, port officials and environmental groups who called the agreement weak.

The California Air Resources Board has been working on cutting pollution from rail yards for over a decade. The latest agreement between the board and the rail companies calls for cuts at four rail yards that could reduce 2005 emission levels by 85 percent by 2020.

"This is not a perfect plan," conceded board member Ronald O. Loveridge, who voted for the agreement. "I'm compelled by certain action now and the need to do something."

The targeted rail yards, which are owned by Union Pacific Railroad and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway, are in San Bernardino, Long Beach and the city of Commerce southeast of downtown Los Angeles.

Public comment at the meeting in Sacramento was largely opposed to the agreement, with some community members weeping as they recalled friends and family members with health problems believed connected to pollution. Many wanted a more stringent plan with faster results.

Bernice Banares, a teacher at a high school close to one of the facilities, said perhaps the board would take the situation more seriously if the pollution was funneled so the board had to breathe it in.

"I'm just frustrated by the lack of urgency to have emissions reduced," she said. "I have a student that just passed away from asthma ... I have many students absent continuously because of their health."

Sam Atwood, spokesman for the South Coast Air Quality Management District, which oversees the urban portions of Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino counties and all of Orange County, also said the plan falls short. His agency and others asked the board to postpone the vote and send the plan back for improvements.

"They should require additional steps that are clearly feasible that the railroads could take," he said. "Why lock in unacceptably high level of health risk?"

Even after the emission goals are met, pollution levels will still be much greater than local air regulators allow a commercial business to have, he said.

Atwood added that the rail companies could speed up the introduction of new, less-polluting locomotives, electric trucks and electric trains, and could move some of the equipment in the rail yards farther away from homes.

But the board's staff cited the success of previous voluntary agreements and said that imposing regulations would invite lawsuits and delay efforts to reduce pollution.

Board officials have said that federal law largely pre-empts them from regulating interstate pollution sources such as railroads, ships and aircraft.

Besides idling ships and truck traffic, trains are significant sources of transportation pollution. Community and environmental groups have urged officials for years to do more to cut down on emission levels.

In 1998 and 2005, the board reached agreements with rail companies aimed at reducing pollution.

Regional air quality officials also had objected to the 2005 agreement with Union Pacific and Burlington Santa Fe Railway on grounds the plan was vague and wouldn't protect the air as well as state legislation or local regulation would.

As part of the 2005 agreement, officials conducted health risk assessments and found that the four rail yards in Southern California had some of the highest pollution levels in the state.

The most recently approved plan sets emission caps for the four rail yards. Each will have a tailored pollution reduction plan with voluntary goals that must be met within a designated timeframe.

Union Pacific spokeswoman Lupe Valdez and others in the railroad industry praised the current proposal.

"It's a big deal for us because we're committing to these goals," she said. "There's no other state in the union doing these types of reductions at rail yards."

[Letter to the Modesto Bee, Friday, June 25, 2010:](#)

Ceres Super Wal-Mart is a bad place

Wal-Mart's ads are misleading many Ceres residents. The ads announce that the new Super Wal-Mart is coming to Mitchell and Service roads. The Super Wal-Mart actually is going to be on the corner of Mitchell and Don Pedro roads with two freight entrances on Don Pedro. The store will sit back away from Mitchell, with the front facing Service Road and the back on Don Pedro Road.

Don Pedro is a short, two-lane road (less than one mile long) in a residential area. The environmental impact report states that even with traffic calming mitigations, the noise, traffic and [air pollution](#) may still be significant.

When the Super Wal-Mart is built, it will draw shoppers from surrounding cities and traffic. Because Don Pedro will have two entrances, shoppers will use this little road so they don't have to deal with the already busy traffic on Mitchell and Service. We also will have an increase in foot traffic on Don Pedro as children walk or ride their bikes to the new elementary school being built nearby. The EIR estimates that Wal-Mart will require approximately seven to nine truck deliveries per day, seven days a week. Wal-Mart does not belong anywhere near residential areas or elementary school children.

Wal-Mart should be built at the southwest corner of Mitchell Ranch Center near the freeway and away from all residential areas. In order to keep traffic to a minimum and criminal activity in check, a solid wall should be built on Don Pedro with no entrance off this road.

Florence Cardenas, Ceres