

EPA to approve air cleanup for 2 Calif. regions

By Gosia Wozniacka, Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle, Modesto Bee and other papers, Wed., June 29, 2011

Fresno, Calif. (AP) -- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said Wednesday it will approve plans and extend the deadline to clean up the soot-laden air in California's San Joaquin Valley and the Los Angeles region after threatening to reject the same plans last fall.

The announcement came after the state submitted new arguments to support cleanup plans in both of the notoriously polluted regions and asked for a five year extension to the original 2010 deadline.

The cleanup concerns microscopic pollution particles that can penetrate deep into the lungs and bloodstream and lead to respiratory problems and premature death.

The San Joaquin Valley and the Los Angeles region have the highest annual levels of this type of pollution — also known as PM-2.5 — in the country.

EPA's decision to approve the cleanup plans met with opposition from environmentalists, who said the agency "backpedaled" to approve plans with previously identified deficiencies.

The EPA says it threatened to reject the plans last November because they relied on emission reductions from rules governing diesel vehicles and marine vessels that weren't complete. The California Air Resources Board is now finalizing those rules — which will impact nearly 1 million vehicles operating in California — so pollution is expected to go down.

The EPA said the board also submitted revised forecasts for current and future emissions from trucks and construction equipment, which state officials said had previously been overestimated. The board also revised its emissions forecasts downward in light of the economy and lower-than-expected growth, the EPA said.

In a statement issued Wednesday, the EPA added that new state and local measures will further curb fine particle pollution.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District recently required restaurants that use commercial charbroilers to install air pollution control equipment and banned farmers from burning waste from various agricultural crops. The local air district in the Los Angeles region also moved to cut the amount of allowable sulfur emissions from hundreds of industrial boilers and limited the amount of solvents allowed in commercial cleaning products.

But those rules still won't allow residents living in those regions to breathe air that meets national pollution standards by 2015, said Paul Cort, an attorney with the environmental group Earthjustice.

One major concern is that volatile organic compounds such as benzene and toluene — which are released when gasoline, wood, coal, or natural gas is burned — also significantly contribute to air pollution, Cort said.

But the state argued that it does not need to control those compounds in its most recent filing supporting the plans.

Plan to clean up diesel soot put on hold

By Mark Grossi

The Fresno Bee, Thurs., June 30, 2011

Reversing a decision made last fall, federal officials on Wednesday supported a rule that extends the deadline to clean up deadly diesel soot in the San Joaquin Valley.

In making the call, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency agreed with an argument by state regulators on a key part of that plan — that the recession had helped curtail trucking so much that there isn't as much deadly diesel soot as the state once believed. The state's diesel regulations are part of the Valley's clean-up plan.

The announcement disappointed environmentalists who fought for more stringent diesel rules from the California Air Resources Board. Environmentalists said they were worried about people in the Valley and the Los Angeles area, which are among the worst-polluted places in the country.

Diesel soot is blamed for thousands of premature deaths in California.

"Sadly, it is the regions' children, elderly and those with compromised health that will pay for EPA's lack of resolve," said lawyer Paul Cort of Earthjustice, an Oakland-based environmental watchdog.

Environmentalists stopped short of threatening a lawsuit, saying they hoped to sway EPA to change its mind before the decision becomes final in the next 30 days.

The EPA in November had rejected soot-cleanup plans, which at the time didn't include final diesel-emission rules. EPA's approval of the plan will head off a federal sanction that would have temporarily deprived the Valley of highway-building funds in two years.

Valley air district officials are counting on the rules to help meet federal pollution targets. Although the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District included the state's diesel reductions in its own cleanup plans for soot, the district did not have the authority to pass the rules.

The diesel rules are the keys to cleaning up soot and other so-called PM-2.5 – tiny pollution specks that can trigger heart and lung problems. More than 40% of the state's PM-2.5 comes from trucks and buses.

The rules also cover construction equipment, buses and ocean-going vessels, but trucks account for most of the pollution. Particle filters and newer engines will be required over the next several years.

In the Valley, diesel trucks directly emit about 10% of the PM-2.5, according to state records. But diesel engines also emit oxides of nitrogen, which combine with ammonia from dairies to create large plumes of chemical PM-2.5, which adds to the Valley's problem.

State and federal officials say the new diesel rules would reduce premature deaths statewide by 3,500 each year. About 250 of those lives would be in the San Joaquin Valley, officials said. Estimates show diesel soot emissions would be trimmed by half in four years and by 70% over the next decade.

Since 2008, environmentalists, industry officials and the state have debated rules to require diesel controls that would drop PM-2.5 to healthy levels, particularly in the Valley and South Coast Air Basin, which covers the greater Los Angeles region.

But the deep recession sparked a battle to soften the rules. In December, just days before key parts of the rules would begin, state officials agreed to roll back the startup by a year, citing the economic downturn and the reduced miles driven by truckers.

After reviewing the state's analysis, EPA agreed that there is less pollution because truckers are driving fewer miles. EPA also agreed with state officials who said they discovered fewer trucking emissions than they first estimated. They underestimated the number of newer, lower-emitting trucks on Valley roads.

"For the San Joaquin Valley, about 5% fewer reductions are needed because of the recession," said Jared Blumenfeld, regional EPA administrator in San Francisco. "And there are about 18% fewer reductions needed because of better emissions estimates."

The rules require particle-pollution filters on nearly all 250,000 of the state's heaviest trucks by 2014.

By 2023, no trucks older than the 2010 model year may operate in the state. The 2010 models are 90% cleaner than older models because of new federal engine standards.

Calif. delays cap and trade

By Jason Dearen, Associated Press

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San Francisco (AP) -- California regulators on Wednesday said they would give power plants, refineries and other major polluters another year to comply with a new state program that provides financial incentives to emit fewer greenhouse gases.

Mary Nichols, chairwoman of the Air Resources Board, said in testimony before a state Senate committee that the government is giving California's major polluters until 2013 to comply with its cap-and-trade program.

Most polluters previously were to have begun cutting emissions under the program in 2012. The program was passed in December by the board, which said it hoped other states would follow suit since Congress had failed to pass national climate change legislation.

"This would not affect the stringency of the program or change the amount of emission reductions that the program will achieve, keeping us on track to meet the 2020 target required by AB32," Nichols said.

Cap and trade is the key piece of the California's 2006 climate law — called AB32 — and will cover 85 percent of the state's worst polluters.

Nichols said the state would still initiate the regulatory framework for cap and trade in 2012, pending the outcome of an appeal of a lawsuit challenging the program.

In general terms, California's cap-and-trade program works by requiring companies that produce pollution, such as a utility or a refinery, to buy permits from the state that allow it to send a specified amount of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the air each year. Those permits could then be bought and sold by the polluters in a marketplace.

If a company in Long Beach is 20 percent under its pollution allowance, for example, it can sell the unused portion to a company in San Francisco that has exceeded its quota.

The seller company gets to keep the money, so polluters can even make a profit, if the marketplace sets a price above the initial cost of the permit.

The amount of emissions allowed would be reduced over time, and the regulations would expand in 2015 to include refineries and fuel distributors, such as oil companies.

The cap would reach its lowest level in 2020, when California wants its greenhouse gas emissions reduced to 1990 levels.

The delay announced Wednesday comes about three months after a San Francisco Superior Court judge halted work on the program, saying the air board had not properly considered alternative programs, as required by state law.

But a state appeals court on Friday allowed the board to resume work on the program, pending an appeal. That has allowed the board to schedule two public hearings on July 8 and 15 to discuss the plan.

"The delay in initial compliance lets the program get on its feet without the angst of everybody asking the question `are they ready?'" said Jon Costantino, a senior adviser at a Sacramento law firm who served formerly as the climate change planning manager at the Air Resources Board. He said the delay gives the board a full year to put finishing touches on the program without having to deal with companies dealing with compliance for the first time.

"Pressure was building on the program. This lets some of that go," he said.

Some environmental groups applauded the board's efforts to allow more time to hone the regulation while not giving up its overall goals.

"This is a smart and responsible step that also ensures that the greenhouse gas pollution reductions required by the program remain unchanged," said Derek Walker, director of strategic climate initiatives for the Environmental Defense Fund.

Setton Pistachio in Terra Bella Set to Celebrate New Solar Project County's Largest Commercial Solar Installation Goes Live Next Month

The Valley Voice, Thurs., June 30, 2011

Terra Bella - Setton Pistachio has almost completed an \$8 million solar project -- to date the largest solar installation for commercial use in the county -- and the Terra Bella plant will be celebrating during a ribbon-cutting ceremony planned for next month.

"The ceremony being held is to commemorate their solar efforts and commitment to sustainable energy," said Nader Yarpezeskan, director of sales and marketing for Cenergy Power, the company involved in the solar installation.

Cenergy Power, a solar company headquartered in Merced, are the engineers, designers and installers of the project.

Two types of solar panels are being installed at Setton's plant, which will power a total of 1.7 mega watts. The panels will also keep cars shaded year-round, said Lee Cohen, general manager for Setton.

The plant will save 1,880 metric tons of carbon dioxide annually on the seven acres it will cover and will produce 2.6 million kilowatt hours per year.

"We planned this project as part of a long term strategy to share in sustainable practice," Cohen said.

The Terra Bella facility is located on 36 acres of farm land and has over 150,000 square feet of processing capabilities, including cold, dry and silo storage.

The plant currently processes around 80 million pounds of pistachios per year, Cohen added.

Construction for the project has been going on for the past six months and when the project is completed in a few weeks, the processing plant will be 100 percent solar powered.

Part of the funding for the solar project has come from federal grants. Setton also participated in the California Solar Initiative, which allowed for incentives and tax credits. Around 30 percent of the total came from Setton.

"We are very proud of this investment, because we care about our environment," Cohen said.

Setton is the second-largest pistachio processor in the United States.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Wed., June 29, 2011:](#)

'Wave flags, not fireworks,' air district leader says

By Mark Grossi

The head of the local air district has come up with a quote that could become a slogan on the Fourth of July: "Wave flags, not fireworks."

Fireworks can be dangerous for public health, says Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

In past years, I have reported one-hour spikes in particle pollution that have been more than 10 times the federal threshold for particulate matter.

Here's what the district said in a news release this week:

"During fireworks displays, dangerous particulate matter increases, pumping large quantities of airborne material, including soot, ash and liquids, into the Valley's air.

"This type of pollution causes serious health effects, including respiratory disease, bronchitis and cardiac illness. PM is especially harmful to people with existing respiratory or cardiac illness, elderly people and children."