

California considers first-in-nation energy efficiency standards for battery chargers

By Dana Hull

Contra Costa Times Thurs., Jan. 12, 2012

The California Energy Commission on Thursday will consider adopting first-in-the-nation energy-efficiency standards for battery chargers, a move the commission says could save the state enough electricity to power a city the size of Bakersfield.

"The portable, handheld vacuum that has been sitting in your garage has been spilling electricity for years," said Adam Gottlieb, the commission's acting communications director. "These proposed rules could save California ratepayers more than \$300 million in wasted electricity and nearly 2,200 gigawatt hours a year -- or enough to power 350,000 homes."

Since the early 1990s, the number of products sold with rechargeable batteries has exploded -- there were an estimated 170 million chargers in California households as of 2009, according to the energy commission. The average California home has 11 battery chargers, used for powering everything from cellphones and tablets to electric toothbrushes, power tools and digital cameras.

Plug-in products can account for up to 15 percent of the energy used in most households. But nearly two-thirds of the 8,000 gigawatt hours of electricity consumed by battery chargers in California each year is wasted, often as heat. Most devices continue charging even when the battery is full, and consumers tend to leave devices and appliances plugged in far longer than they need to

Under the proposed regulations, battery chargers sold in California would have to charge efficiently and stop charging once the batteries are full. The regulations would go into effect for most consumer products by February 2013.

California has a long history of adopting efficiency standards for appliances like refrigerators, air conditioners, clothes dryers and televisions that other states have followed. Those regulations have helped make California the most energy-efficient state in the nation. A report released this month by the nonprofit Institute for Electric Efficiency found that while California has 12.1 percent of the nation's population, it used only 6.9 percent of the nation's electricity in 2011.

Environmentalists applaud the proposed standards, saying that more energy-efficient battery chargers would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 1.8 million tons annually, the equivalent of removing 138,000 cars from the roads.

"California will lead the way," said Pierre Delforge, senior engineer at the Natural Resources Defense Council. "As a result, California consumers can be assured that the new devices they buy, such as cordless phones and power tools, have up-to-date charging systems and no longer waste large amounts of electricity to charge the battery inside them."

Delforge is cautiously optimistic that the energy commission will adopt the new regulations, which have been under discussion for 18 months. But the issue is not without controversy. Manufacturers and many trade associations, including the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers, have weighed in during the public comment period with concerns about a timeline they consider to be overly aggressive.

"It cannot be overstated the degree of effort that manufacturers must put into the retooling process to adjust to significant standards changes," the association wrote in a letter to the commission.

The Consumer Electronics Association warns that the proposed regulations could impact product development and innovation, but many consumer electronics manufacturers make chargers that already meet the proposed standards.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Thursday, Jan. 12, 2012:](#)

Unfair air quality fines

Most agree that equitable air pollution regulations are necessary. However, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is required by the Environmental Protection Agency to levy a \$29 million fine every day air standards are not met in this region. District vehicle owners must now pay one such fine, with yet another being tacked onto DMV fees. Also, uncontrolled growth makes more fines inevitable.

According to our Constitution, Congress makes laws and the judiciary enforces them. What's going on? Why does the EPA, which does not answer to the public, mandate such sweeping regulations and collect such horrendous fines? Worse still, the EPA spends fine money as it pleases, and cares nothing about resulting hardships to automobile owners.

Why is the Valley being targeted? What about air pollution from surrounding areas that drift in? Why give traffic traveling through the area a free pass? The natural inversion layer, which has trapped pollution for eons, should have long ago been a signal to curb further development here.

This "whether you like it or not" style of government is unjust. As our standards of living and freedoms are challenged, why do we never hear the voices of our elected representatives?

Shirley Secrest, Fresno