

AQMD plan would fight smog mainly through incentives, not rules

Tony Barboza

Los Angeles Times, Thursday, June 30, 2016

For decades, regulators have attacked Southern California's notorious smog through an ever-stricter array of regulations that forced polluters to deploy cleaner technology.

But a plan released Thursday by the South Coast Air Quality Management District takes a more industry-friendly approach. It relies on finding billions in incentive funds to encourage people and businesses to voluntarily transition to lower-polluting cars, trucks and equipment.

The proposal outlines how regulators plan to curb the nation's worst smog to meet a series of federal deadlines over the next 15 years by giving priority to "nonregulatory" approaches. In addition to seeking \$11 to \$14 billion in incentive money, the plan would take credit for "co-benefits," the air quality improvements expected to result from climate change, transportation and energy efficiency programs being carried out by other agencies.

The plan's reliance on voluntary measures and credits rather than traditional regulations sparked immediate criticism from environmentalists. They said the proposal lacks funding and enforcement mechanisms, and would shift financial responsibility for cleaning the air toward taxpayers and away from polluting industries.

"This is not a real plan, it's a promise to let polluters off the hook," said Angela Johnson Meszaros, an attorney for the environmental nonprofit Earthjustice.

The plan is the latest indication of a shift at the powerful pollution control agency, which is responsible for protecting the health of 17 million people across a vast basin that spans Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

The AQMD has come under fire from environmentalists and state lawmakers since Republicans took control of its governing board and fired its longtime executive this year, with some new members pledging to make pollution regulations easier on businesses.

Regulators have made tremendous progress on reducing Southern California smog, with pollution levels dropping to about a third of what they were in the 1970s and '80s. But the region remains far from meeting federal health standards and progress has leveled off in recent years. AQMD officials say they have nearly exhausted their options for reducing smog-forming pollutants through traditional control measures.

"We think we've gone as far as we can and what's left is going to be these innovative approaches," said Philip Fine, a deputy executive officer with the air district. "We don't see any other way."

The plan's main target is ozone, the lung-searing gas that forms when pollution from cars, trucks, factories and other combustion sources reacts in the heat and sunlight. Ozone pollution, which triggers asthma and other respiratory problems, plagues Southern California's inland valleys and mountains, reaching the nation's worst levels on hot summer afternoons.

To meet federal health standards, the region must cut emissions of ozone-forming nitrogen oxides to under 100 tons per day by 2031, or 55% beyond all existing regulations, from the current level of about 500 tons per day.

Central to the plan is a proposal to spend \$11 billion to \$14 billion on emissions-cutting incentive programs over the next 15 years, a nearly 20-fold increase from the \$56 million a year in incentive funds the district receives now.

While no specific funding sources were identified, the plan says Congress could create a national fund for cleaning the regions with the most polluted air, an idea modeled on the federal Superfund program for hazardous waste sites.

Evan Gillespie, who directs the Sierra Club's My Generation campaign, was skeptical. "The air district has no way of paying for the incentives now, nor do they even have a defensible plan to raise the money needed," he said.

The pursuit of alternatives to traditional regulations reflects a longstanding complaint by local pollution regulators that they have little control over some of the biggest sources of pollution. While heavy-duty trucks, cars, locomotives, cargo ships and other mobile sources emit more than 80% of the region's nitrogen oxides, they are regulated by state and federal authorities.

Among the measures proposed in the plan is an ultra-low emissions standard for heavy-duty trucks that the air district has petitioned the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to adopt.

The plan identifies some traditional regulations to cut pollution from industrial flares, as well as from cooking burners in homes and restaurants. It also includes a proposal for additional pollution cuts to a cap-and-trade program for oil refineries and other major facilities that is likely to face opposition from the petroleum industry. But the strategies for cutting emissions from facilities in the freight sector -- including ports, warehouses and rail yards -- would be executed on a voluntary basis, AQMD officials said.

Business groups said they were reviewing the plan.

In a statement, Western States Petroleum Assn. President Catherine Reheis-Boyd said her group wants to work "toward a thoughtful, balanced approach that is in the overall best interest of the South Coast Basin."

The public has until Aug. 19 to comment on the plan before it is revised. Officials expect the proposal to go before the air-quality board for consideration in December. The state Air Resources Board must approve the plan before sending it along to the EPA for review.

Manteca snags \$1.8M grant for fueling station

By Dennis Wyatt

Manteca Bulletin, Friday, July 1, 2016

Manteca's bid to be greener on three fronts — reducing methane gas emissions from the wastewater treatment plant, diverting food waste from landfills, and running clean burning refuse collection trucks — will cost sewer ratepayers less green than planned.

That's because the city has been awarded \$1.8 million by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to offset the cost of constructing a compressed natural gas fuel facility at the wastewater treatment plant on West Yosemite Avenue. The CNG will come by blending food waste with methane gas from the treatment plant. The fuel station will be used to fuel city refuse trucks as well as be available for purchase by the public.

The system, including the fueling station, is expected to be operation before the end of 2008.

The project is being overseen by Public Works Deputy Director/Utility Services John Clymo. The grant represents all of the money the air quality board had set aside for alternative fuel infrastructure in the northern San Joaquin Valley.

The food waste is currently being trucked to Harvest Power in Lathrop where it is converted into compost.

Once a facility has been put in place at the wastewater treatment plant, the city will start producing fuel for trucks. A sorting device is also being out in place at Lovelace Transfer Station where food waste for residential Toters will be separated from other garbage and sent to the wastewater treatment plant.

Commercial food waste will be collected separately as it is now. As an added bonus, the containers the food waste is placed are locked which also should greatly reduce if not eliminate people avenging through them for food and creating a mess. The waste containers are locked for health reasons to avoid smell becoming an issue as well as to prevent it from attracting flies.

While all cities and counties need to start recycling food waste under state mandate, Manteca is one of the first to go a step further and combine it with solid waste from wastewater to convert it into fuel to power vehicles. The city has started replacing its refuse collection trucks with those that burn natural gas. Eventually as all of the more than two dozen trucks reach the end of their useful life, the entire fleet will be converted. The switch will also help Manteca to meet stringent air standards that are being put in place for the San Joaquin Valley.

Manteca and other California cities must reduce the food waste they bury by 50 percent by 2018 under state law. Food waste — based on a survey made of random residential brown Toters switched out on a collection day that had their contents shifted through by hand — constitutes 35 percent of Manteca's garbage. While that seems high it is below the state average for food waste in garbage at 40 percent.

Valley residents warned about foul Fourth air

Central Valley Business Times, Thursday, June 30, 2016

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials are warning Valley residents that July 4th could be dangerous to their health.

That's because fireworks increase levels of dangerous particulate matter (PM), including soot, ash and metals, which cause serious health impacts, especially to people with existing respiratory conditions, elderly people and small children.

Fine particulate matter can invade the bloodstream and has been linked to heart attacks and stroke. On July 4th, the Valley experiences dangerous particulate levels four or five times higher than the health based federal standards, "which are all due in part to personal fireworks used throughout Valley neighborhoods," the air pollution district says.

"We urge Valley residents to exhibit their patriotism by attending a professional Independence Day event in their area instead of using personal fireworks," says Seyed Sadredin, the District's executive director and air pollution control officer. "Each year, people suffer serious health consequences from direct exposure in the neighborhoods where they live and breathe... from fireworks activities that are entirely preventable."

Air quality in the Valley during summer is already burdened by ozone pollution, and fireworks emissions add to what already may be poor air quality, the pollution officials say. Air monitors throughout the Valley reflect spikes in particulate pollution every year following Fourth of July fireworks displays.

Agencies urge fireworks safety during holiday celebrations

By Jason Kotowski

Bakersfield Californian, Friday, July 1, 2016

The Fourth of July weekend comes with certain traditions.

There may be days spent poolside, picnics with hamburgers and hotdogs fresh off the grill along with sliced, cool watermelon, and maybe a ballgame or two.

But there's often a downside to the festivities in Kern County. Whether it's a burned home or dozens of pets fleeing into the night, explosions and sparks from fireworks have been an ongoing, sometimes destructive, problem during the holiday.

A number of agencies spanning firefighting, health care and animal control sent out news releases this week asking residents to exercise caution during celebrations, and, if fireworks are used, make sure they have the "safe and sane" stamp on them.

Here are suggestions for safe celebrations in Kern County:

- Don't let your children play with fireworks, even harmless-seeming sparklers, a San Joaquin Community Hospital release said. Sparklers can reach upwards of 1,800 degrees and are responsible for a third of related injuries to the children under the age of 5.

If a minor burn occurs, run cool water over it for 15 to 20 minutes, the San Joaquin release said. Leave blisters intact, protect the area from heat, sun and dirt and wash the wound gently with mild soap and water. Do not place butter, toothpaste or anything similar on a burn as it could cause infection, and seek medical attention if pain, swelling or redness increases, the victim is under 2, has a fever, or the burn looks white or leathery.

- City residents can get their pets microchipped for free Friday, July 1, in anticipation of the holiday. Free chips will be administered from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday at the City of Bakersfield Animal Care Center, and the animals must have a current license.

Each year, the shelter sees a surge in animal intakes because of fireworks, it said in a release. With microchips, shelter workers can quickly reunite pets with their families. Redemption fees will also be discounted July 5-9 to remove financial barriers that may keep owners from being able to retrieve their pets.

The shelter is at 201 S. Mt. Vernon Avenue, 832-7387.

- Los Padres National Forest officials are reminding Fourth of July visitors that possessing fireworks, including the “safe and sane” variety, is prohibited in the forest at all times. Rangers and law enforcement officers will enforce the ban throughout the long weekend, a U.S Forest Service news release said.

Under current fire restrictions, campfires are permitted in “campfire use sites” only, and must be attended at all times by an adult with a shovel and adequate supply of water to douse the fire. Lanterns and portable stoves using gas, jellied petroleum or pressurized liquid fuel are permitted outside campfire use sites, but only with a valid California campfire permit. Permits are available free at any Forest Service office or online at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/lpnf>.

Smoking is prohibited in all areas of the forest except within an enclosed vehicle, building or designated campfire use site, the release said. Avoid parking vehicles on grass as hot engines can ignite dry vegetation.

- Residents are being asked to consider ways to celebrate the holiday that don’t involve fireworks as they increase levels of dangerous particulate matter, including soot, ash and metals, which cause serious health impacts, a San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District release said.

On July 4, the San Joaquin Valley experiences dangerous particulate levels four or five times higher than health-based federal standards, due in part to personal fireworks, the release said. Particulate matter can have serious health impacts, especially to people with existing respiratory conditions, the elderly and small children.

- North of the River Recreation and Park District has announced that fireworks of any kind are prohibited at all 24 of their parks, as well as at or near any of their community centers.

- Bakersfield firefighters will confiscate illegal fireworks and issue citations during the holiday weekend. A press conference was scheduled for Friday morning at Bakersfield Fire Department headquarters.