

News Release



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Air Board to consider 'extreme' downgrade

[December 15, 2003] Fresno -- On Thursday, the Governing Board of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will again consider downgrading the Valley's ozone designation from "severe" to "extreme" non-attainment.

The board last visited the issue in 2002 when Air District staff proposed the voluntary action because of the Valley's inability to demonstrate acceptable improvements in smog levels by 2005. Ozone is a main component of smog.

The Valley Air District would be the first air district in the country to request the extreme non-attainment designation. Currently, Los Angeles is the only air basin to be so designated.

Under the current severe classification, the air basin would need to demonstrate clean-air data starting in 2003 in order to attain the standard by 2005. Failure to meet the deadline could result in fees up to \$36 million annually for Valley businesses and the loss of \$2.2 billion in federal highway funds.

The District has authority over stationary sources, such as factories, refineries and other industrial processes that contribute to smog problem. However, the District cannot

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regulate mobile sources, which account for nearly 60 percent of the smog problem valley-wide.

A reclassification to extreme non-attainment would set a new attainment deadline of 2010. The state and federal governments have scheduled substantial controls on mobile emission sources that will not take effect until after 2005. With these controls in place, the Valley will be much closer to achieving the emission reductions needed to meet standards.

Air District officials are adamant that the downgrade request does not imply a reduced effort in cleaning up the Valley's air.

“This decision would not mean there will be a delay in improving air quality in the Valley,” said Dave Crow, the Air District's Air Pollution Control Officer. “Staff members will continue to propose all feasible control measures for the Governing Board's approval. And we will continue to press EPA and ARB to implement additional control measure on sources under their jurisdiction. The request for a downgrade only deals with Clean Air Act sanctions.”

If approved by the board, the request would then be reviewed by the California Air Resources Board and sent to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for approval.

MEDIA ADVISORY

The Air District will hold a press conference Thursday, Dec. 18, at 3 p.m. at the District's Fresno office: 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave. The press conference will be video-conferenced to the District's Modesto and Bakersfield offices with staff available locally for comment.