

EPA limits lawnmower emissions to stem pollution

By ERICA WERNER, Associated Press Writer

Modesto Bee, Sacramento Bee, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Friday, Sept. 5, 2008

WASHINGTON — Gasoline-powered lawnmowers that are a big cause of summertime air pollution will have to be dramatically cleaner under rules issued Thursday by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The long-awaited regulation requires a 35 percent reduction in emissions from new lawn and garden equipment beginning in 2011. Big emission reductions are also required for speedboats and other recreational watercraft, beginning in 2010.

The reductions will be the equivalent of removing one out of every five cars and trucks on the road, according to Bill Becker, executive director of the National Association of Clean Air Agencies.

EPA said approximately 190 million gallons of gasoline will be saved each year when the rules take effect, and more than 300 premature deaths prevented annually.

"These standards help fight smog in our neighborhoods and waterways as we continue to improve the environmental landscape," said EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson.

The regulation had been delayed for years by opposition from Sen. Kit Bond, R-Mo., who took up the cause of small-engine manufacturer Briggs & Stratton Corp., which builds many of its engines in Missouri. The final rule Thursday was issued more than a year after the draft rule came out in April 2007.

EPA estimated the cost of implementing the reductions at \$236 million a year, which will likely make its way to consumers in the form of more expensive lawnmowers and other machines.

Industry groups said exact figures were difficult to calculate, but the California Air Resources Board has estimated that walk-behind mowers would cost 18 percent more under the new regulation, while the price of commercial turf care mowers would rise about 3 percent.

"It's been an undertaking," said Kris Kiser, vice president of public affairs at the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, Inc. "Challenging, but again, fair and achievable and it's the right thing to do."

Environmentalists welcomed the regulation, which applies to lawn care engines under 25 horsepower and to a full range of gas-powered personal watercraft. The rule requires a 70 percent reduction in emissions from recreational watercraft.

"These new clean air standards will reduce dangerous smog pollution from high-emitting gasoline engines while helping to cut costs at the gas pump," said Vickie Patton, the Environmental Defense Fund's deputy general counsel.

The reductions on lawn mower emissions will probably be accomplished by adding catalytic converters that reduce pollution from exhaust but add cost.

Some in industry resisted the change, and Briggs & Stratton found a vocal champion in Bond. He and fellow Appropriations Committee member Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., spent years sparring over the issue after California sought EPA permission to implement its own small engine controls in 2003.

Bond tried to insert language in a spending bill to keep the state from doing so, but backed off under pressure from Feinstein, and California began implementing its rules last year. Bond did succeed in blocking other states from being able to copy California's rule, something the Clean

Air Act normally allows. Instead, he required EPA to write the national standard that was issued Thursday.

Bond had questioned whether mowers with catalytic converters could spark fires, but an EPA study done at his behest found there was no safety problem - even while further delaying implementation of the rule.

Feinstein called Thursday's EPA announcement "great news, and the end of a very long road."

"These smaller engines are responsible for 7 percent of all the smog-forming emissions produced by mobile sources in the United States," Feinstein said. "So, these reductions are critical to improving America's air quality. This is a case where the EPA got it right."

Weekend start: Temperatures in 100s, poor air quality

By Niesha Lofing

Modesto Bee, Friday, Sept. 5, 2009

Triple digit heat and poor air quality will start the weekend, but better weather conditions are expected in the Sacramento region by Sunday.

Temperatures are forecast to reach 101 degrees in downtown Sacramento and 102 at the Sacramento Executive Airport today, with lows dropping to between 60 and 68 degrees throughout the region tonight, said Karl Swanberg, a National Weather Service meteorologist.

The heat isn't the only thing making for uncomfortable conditions today, however.

Air quality in the region is forecast to be unhealthy for sensitive groups today and Saturday, according to the Sacramento Regional Air Quality Resource.

A red flag warning also is in effect today. The warnings are in place when weather conditions heighten the risk of fire danger.

But there is hope for cooler conditions soon.

A storm over the Pacific Ocean will begin to move inland over southern California, bringing cooler air and causing temperatures to start declining by Sunday, said Brooke Bingaman, a weather service forecaster.

That's good news for the Sacramento region, which is currently experiencing temperatures at least 10 degrees above normal.

Normal for this time of year is 91 degrees, she said.

"With the triple digit heat, we need something to cool us down," Bingaman said. "That cooler air will be a welcome change."

The coolest conditions are forecast for Monday and Tuesday, when highs will reach 92 and 87 degrees respectively, she said.

Another day of hot temperatures, poor air expected

The Associated Press

Tri-Valley Herald and Modesto Bee, Friday, Sept. 5, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO—A forecast of at least one more day of hot temperatures and poor air quality has prompted air quality officials to issue another "Spare the Air" advisory for the Bay Area.

Because the air quality is expected to be unhealthy with high ozone levels, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District is urging the public to cut down on driving Friday.

It's the second day in a row the district has issued the advisory.

The worst smog is expected in eastern and central Contra Costa and Alameda counties from Martinez to Sunol, and in Benicia and Suisun City in Solano County.

The National Weather Service is predicting record highs are possible throughout the region.

Martinez is expected to see a high of 98 degrees, with Oakland topping off at 90.

Asian soot, smog may boost global warming in US

By SETH BORENSTEIN, AP Science Writer

Modesto Bee, Sacramento Bee, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Friday, Sept. 5, 2008

WASHINGTON — Smog, soot and other particles like the kind often seen hanging over Beijing add to global warming and may raise summer temperatures in the American heartland by three degrees in about 50 years, says a new federal science report released Thursday.

These overlooked, shorter-term pollutants - mostly from burning wood and kerosene and from driving trucks and cars - cause more localized warming than once thought, the authors of the report say. They contend there should be a greater effort to attack this type of pollution for faster results.

For decades, scientists have concentrated on carbon dioxide, the most damaging greenhouse gas because it lingers in the atmosphere for decades. Past studies have barely paid attention to global warming pollution that stays in the air merely for days.

The new report, written by scientists with NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, makes a case for tackling the short-term pollutants, while acknowledging that carbon dioxide is still the chief cause of warming.

That concept is also the official policy of the Bush Administration, said assistant secretary of commerce Bill Brennan.

In the United States, this approach would mean cutting car and truck emissions perhaps before restricting coal-burning power plants. In the developing world, especially Asia, it would mean shifting to cleaner energy sources, more like those used in the Western world. Much of this type of pollution in Asia comes from burning kerosene and biofuels, such as wood and animal dung.

In addition to soot, smog and sulfates, other short-lived pollutants are organic carbon, dust and nitrates. While carbon dioxide is invisible, these are pollutants people can see.

Projected increases in some of these pollutants and decreases in others in Asia will eventually add up to about 20 percent of the already-predicted man-made summer warming in America by 2060, the report said.

"What they do about their pollution can affect our climate," said study co-author Hiram "Chip" Levy, a senior scientist at NOAA's fluid dynamics lab in Princeton, N.J.

This pollution will likely create three "hot spots" in the world: the central United States, Europe around the Mediterranean Sea, and Kazakhstan, which borders Russia and China. In the United States it's "a big blob in the middle of the country" stretching from the Rocky Mountains to the Appalachians, Levy said.

The same analysis also shows about an inch less of yearly rain in middle America because of Asian emissions by about 2060.

As far as American-produced pollution, smog is the main problem. Reducing diesel emissions and increasing mass transit would prove a more effective and immediate strategy over limiting power plants, said study co-author Drew Shindell, a climate scientist at NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies in New York.

The report make sense, but should also include a strategy for man-made methane, a greenhouse gas which lasts 10 years in the atmosphere, said Michael MacCracken, chief scientist at the Climate Institute in Washington. Methane mostly comes from landfills, natural gas use, livestock, coal mining and sewage treatment, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Suit targets Chevron's Richmond refinery plan

Carolyn Jones, Chronicle Staff Writer
S.F. Chronicle, Friday, September 5, 2008

Environmental groups filed suit Thursday to derail Chevron's plan to upgrade and expand its Richmond refinery to process lower-grade crude oil.

Communities for a Better Environment and three other groups, in a lawsuit filed in Contra Costa County Superior Court, asked a judge to overturn the city of Richmond's environmental impact report on the refinery project, saying it inadequately considered the likely increases in pollution.

"The whole EIR is fundamentally flawed," said Greg Karras, senior scientist at Communities for a Better Environment in Oakland. "We're saying, 'If you want to move forward with this project, you've got to analyze it properly.' "

The Richmond City Council narrowly approved Chevron's plans on July 17 after weeks of protests and testimony from community groups and labor unions. The plan allows Chevron to install new equipment to process 1,000 more barrels of gasoline a day, using crude oil that has 3 percent more sulfur than the oil it currently handles.

Environmental groups say the change will increase toxic emissions by 5 to 50 times higher than current levels, posing serious health risks to workers and neighbors. Refinery officials say the new equipment is cleaner and more modern than existing refinery facilities, and will decrease overall emissions at the century-old refinery.

Chevron's Richmond refinery, the largest in the region, provides about 25 percent of all the gasoline in Northern California and nearly all the jet fuel to the Bay Area's three airports.

Company spokesman Dean O'Hair said environmental review was more than adequate.

"It's tough to imagine that after a 3 1/2-year environmental review and permitting process that anyone would not consider the environmental review rather thorough," he said. "It's difficult to see, at this point, how they would question the merits."

Richmond Mayor Gayle McLaughlin, who voted against the project, said she wasn't surprised by the lawsuit.

"The plaintiffs submitted well-researched and well-annotated arguments against this project," she said. "I agree the EIR had many shortcomings."

Richmond City Councilman Tony Thurmond, who voted against the project but for the environmental impact report, said he thought the report adequately "addressed the various risks."

Thurmond voted against Chevron's use permit because he wanted a cap on the amount of low-grade crude oil Chevron could process.

Richmond City Manager Bill Lindsay had no comment on the lawsuit because he had not yet reviewed it.

BAY AREA

Spare the Air for 13th time this year

Chronicle staff

S.F. Chronicle, Friday, September 5, 2008

Today is a Spare the Air Day in the Bay Area, the second in a row and the 13th this year - the highest total in a decade.

Forecasters for the Bay Area Air Quality Management District called the Spare the Air Day as temperatures soared into the 90s Thursday afternoon - even in downtown San Francisco, where the 93-degree reading set a record for the date. The old mark of 90 was established in 1961.

Winds are forecast to remain light today, contributing to the buildup of smog in inland areas that prompts the air district to call Spare the Air days.

Air quality is expected to be acceptable in San Francisco and other areas around the bay. But in central and eastern Contra Costa, Alameda and Solano counties, smog levels are predicted to hit unhealthy levels for sensitive groups.

The air district says active children and adults, and people with respiratory diseases such as asthma, should minimize outdoor activities.

The 13 Spare the Air days this year mark the most since 1998, when there were 23. Last year, there were two.

During Spare the Air days, residents are asked to take transit, minimize driving, turn up the thermostat on their air conditioners and avoid using aerosol sprays or gas-powered lawn mowers. There is no free public transit.

[Bakersfield Californian commentary, Friday, Sept. 5, 2008:](#)

Cut Bakersfield some slack

Bakersfield is the best place that I have ever lived, by far. But it seems the media will not cut Bakersfield any slack. True, Bakersfield has gang and graffiti problems, some air quality issues, an occasional outdoor pungent odor or two.

But wait one moment. Let's put this into perspective.

In my lifetime, I have lived all over the map, including Los Angeles, San Diego and Omaha, Neb. All of the other places share the very same problems and some of them are much worse.

For example, you will definitely not escape gangs and graffiti by moving to Los Angeles, for that fact, Nebraska. There is rumor of bad air in Los Angeles, as well. Having said that, let's talk about what excellence I have seen in my three years living here.

I have encountered some of the friendliest and most down-to-earth people, even friendlier than in the Midwest. There is also diversity. All ethnicities are represented here in some form, not to mention the extensive variety of ethnic foods.

Now that we are on the subject of foods, isn't most of it either grown or raised in the valley? It doesn't get any fresher.

What about Bakersfield's weather? Endless sunshine. Doesn't it seem that the sun never rests? None of the other places can boast about this. No June gloom here. Sell the umbrella and buy some sunglasses, instead. Or how about Bakersfield's low humidity, which is great for all of us with arthritis?

Bakersfield also has housing that is very affordable, compared to our neighbors to the north and south, and in some cases the Midwest. It's actually gotten even more affordable, recently. For example your \$295,000 can buy a very nice home here with all the trimmings. In San Francisco, you can purchase a one-bedroom closet-size condo. Renting is a bargain, as well.

Talk about bang for your buck. Here is another point that you might keep in mind. Try leaving work at 5 p.m. on Friday and getting home within 15 to 20 minutes in most other cities. It is common to do that here.

Although this can be achieved in Los Angeles, San Diego and San Francisco, can you afford a helicopter?

And you have to love those wide Bakersfield streets, where you can open up the throttle a little (careful).

Overall, Bakersfield is a great place to live and work. The larger cities are within a moment's notice if needed. And as Bakersfield continues to grow, more shopping and restaurants will be coming soon.

Bakersfield has something for everyone. I am happy to call Bakersfield home.

Hector Pena is a call center supervisor.

[Tri-Valley Herald editorial, Friday, Sept. 5, 2008:](#)

Smart growth measure will combat emissions

TWO YEARS AGO, California made a precedent-setting commitment to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. That's when Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed landmark legislation aimed at cutting the emissions 25 percent by 2020.

It is an ambitious goal that, if reached, would result in cleaner air, a reduction in fossil fuel use and less dependence on imported oil. However, cutting back on greenhouse gases is particularly challenging in a state with a population that is expected to grow from about 37 million today to more than 42 million by 2020.

Any successful attempt to reduce greenhouse gases must include ways to cut back on fuel consumption by passenger cars, which account for 30 percent of emissions.

Technology will play a major role as hybrid and other high-mileage cars replace less efficient vehicles. But more must be done if California is to meet its goals. Less driving and greater fuel efficiency is needed.

That is where Senate Bill 375 by Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, comes in. The measure's supporters understand that reducing greenhouse gas emissions is best accomplished with a comprehensive plan that includes land use as well as transportation strategies.

The measure requires the California Air Resources Board to set vehicle emission reduction targets for different regions of the state by 2010. Then, each of the state's 17 metropolitan planning associations would devise a plan to meet the goals.

One of the key strategies of SB375 is to reduce suburban sprawl by linking transportation money to "smart growth" planning. Cities and counties could continue to approve developments. However, only those that are built near transit or clustered near current developments would be eligible for a share of state transportation money.

If new residential and commercial growth is directed toward transit villages and infill projects that are nearer to jobs, shopping and mass transportation, people are likely to drive significantly less.

The alternative is more suburban sprawl that requires more driving miles and reduces open space and agricultural land.

What makes SB375 so appealing is its lack of draconian measures to force people out of their cars. Instead, it uses positive inducements for developers to build intelligently. The bill also exempts qualified "smart growth" developments from the California Environmental Quality Act requirements.

This exemption saves builders from the considerable time and expense of what can be a tedious CEQA process.

The proactive, positive approach of SB375 has earned the bill the support of the California Building Industry Association.

The measure still does not have the support of some business groups and those fearful of losing local control over land use.

But there is no way to successfully cut greenhouse gas emissions or the wasteful use of nonrenewable fossil fuels and imported oil without regional planning that curbs suburban sprawl.

It is far better to act now, using positive incentives, to help Californians drive less without imposing higher fuel taxes, registration fees or driving restrictions.

We are confident that Californians can significantly cut back on their consumption of fossil fuels with new technology and intelligent development that results in less driving.

SB375 is an important part of that strategy and merits bipartisan support in the Legislature and the governor's signature.

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Thursday, Sept. 4, 2008](#)

Not all can be blamed on BATS

The writer of "Make bay and foothills stop burning" (Aug. 21, Letters) blames the valley smog on all of those darned Bay Area drivers and pollution-causing liberals. Yes, you do live in a valley which acts like a bowl and collects bad air; however, bad air days do not occur on windy days. If anything, the delta breezes, which arise in the Bay Area everyone here seems to hate, clean the bad air out.

The worst PSI ratings occur on days where there is no wind, either in the dead of winter when the tule fog collects the smoke and dust or in the heat of summer. KCRA shows the path of pollution on bad smog days.

It arises in areas such as Sacramento or Merced County and spreads out. I have never noticed it shown as an evil, dark, satanic-shaped cloud looming over, say, San Francisco and reaching its arms over here.

Has anyone thought diesel fuel? Farmers use it to run tractors, use it to fuel trucks to carry crops or cows to trains which also run on diesel. All of this billows up into the air and adds to our pollution.

Can we end this nonsense of blaming BATS for the valley's problems?

GLENN DITMAN, Modesto

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Friday, Sept. 5, 2008:](#)

Improve rail service

The front page of The Bee Aug. 28 carried a story on the high cost of flying out of Fresno.

How many times do I have to write this same letter? Get rid of expensive, frustrating, time-consuming, polluting, short-hop air travel and improve passenger rail service in the Valley to feed the San Jose, Sacramento, Oakland and San Francisco airports for connections to longer and much cheaper flights.

Paul Volker, Fresno

[Letters to the Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Sept. 5, 2008:](#)

Plant must move

Arvin residents have been plagued by the air pollution, odor and flies produced by Grimmway Enterprise's chicken manure compost facility for many years.

While we applaud Grimmway's proposal to relocate the facility away from Arvin, the Committee for a Better Arvin does not support forcing the same issues that have impacted Arvin onto another community.

The Committee for a Better Arvin joins the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment in demanding that Grimmway protect the health and well-being of nearby residents wherever it moves. Moving the facility away from Arvin is the right thing to do. Moving it next door to Mettler without controlling odors, flies, air emissions and water pollution is not.

The Committee for a Better Arvin and the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment have worked together for many months to encourage Grimmway to move the facility, to comply with Kern County's requirements in permitting a new facility and to control air and water pollution from the facility no matter where it is located. Grimmway should not get a free pass on legal requirements just because it is leaving Arvin.

Good neighbors do not break promises and the Committee for a Better Arvin remains committed to seeing that Grimmway lives up to its promises. The recent protest in front of the Grimmway facility demonstrated our commitment. Grimmway must comply with the law and mitigate its environmental impacts wherever the facility ends up.

SALVADOR PARTIDA, Arvin

Yes on water, no on rail

I am writing to congratulate two local legislators for representing their districts with outstanding positions in the state assembly and state senate. Assemblywoman Nicole Parra is being harassed by her Democratic colleagues for standing strong on a vote to support a vote on the water bond. Water is the biggest issue this state faces. We have a crisis in the Delta which could cut off the water to 22 million people. Thank you, Nicole.

Sen. Roy Ashburn is also to be commended for not supporting the \$10 billion high-speed rail bond as originally written. We need water, not a high-speed rail boondoggle. Everyone is concerned about bad air quality in the valley. Well, if the high-speed rail system is put in place, the valley will become a bedroom bonanza for Los Angeles and San Francisco.

The 640 acres of farmland planted to almonds (76,800 trees) or some other crop is taking carbon dioxide out of the air and replacing it with oxygen, whereas 640 acres of housing with four homes per acre equals 2,560 homes -- and two cars per home gives you 5,120 cars.

I think farming is a positive choice for the greatest agricultural production area in the world. No on \$10 billion for high-speed rail. Yes on the water bond.

FRED L. STARRH, Shafter