

State presents bold plan to clean up air

Kelly Zito, Staff Writer

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California regulators, following the lead of Bay Area air quality managers, would impose fees on the state's worst air polluters as part of a bold proposal to slash emissions to 1990 levels.

The fees, along with green technology job training and a cap-and-trade system outlined Wednesday by the California Air Resources Board, would vault the state ahead of federal efforts to curb climate-changing greenhouse gases.

The plan is "recognition of the severity of the problem and realizing that many of the leadership opportunities to act exist on the state level," board Chairwoman Mary Nichols told a conference of business leaders in Silicon Valley on Wednesday. "There was no excuse for us to stay on the sidelines. We had to work."

Nichols' agency is charged with implementing California's landmark AB32, a 2006 law requiring the state to cut greenhouse gas emissions by about 174 million metric tons by 2020. In June, the board released a draft plan that, among other things, calls for California to derive one-third of its energy from renewable sources such as solar and wind systems.

The plan also includes further reductions in carbon emissions from cars and expanding existing energy efficiency programs.

Wednesday's final 142-page proposal incorporated more than 40,000 public comments sent via e-mail, research reports and postcards, officials said. It is scheduled to go before the Air Resources Board for approval in December.

The plan drew praise from Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and at least one influential environmental group that called it not just "a pollution reduction plan ... (but) an economic stimulus plan."

In its analysis of the proposal's impact on the economy, the board found that curbing carbon emissions and developing new green technology would boost economic production by \$33 billion and add 100,000 jobs. Many of those jobs would come from new training programs at community colleges and other institutions.

Some business groups, however, called the board's figures too optimistic.

"We continue to have concerns about the economic analysis and feel the program will be costly," said Catherine Reheis-Boyd, chief operating officer for Western States Petroleum Association, adding that tax credits could help offset some of the costs businesses would incur.

Sprawl problem

Others said the plan doesn't go far enough, particularly on the issue of sprawl - blamed for forcing millions into long, costly commutes. The June draft report recommended land use policies that would trim emissions from new development by 2 million metric tons by 2020. The final report upped the total to 5 million metric tons. One group, however, advocated for even bigger cuts, on the order of 11 million to 14 million metric tons.

"Growing smarter and increasing public transportation will not only fight global warming, it will also reduce traffic, improve community health, save energy and help grow our local economy," Jake Mackenzie, mayor of Rohnert Park and vice chair of government relations for the Local Government Commission, said in a statement. "But we'll reap the rewards only if we set a high bar."

Air Resources Board officials say certain parts of the plan will develop over decades. Over the next three years, the board will come up with detailed measures aimed at accomplishing the broader goals.

One of those specifics will be the fees paid by large polluters. Similar to a first-in-the-nation program enacted this summer by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, the state board would charge big emitters for each ton of carbon they release. The money would pay for the cost to monitor greenhouse gases.

Nichols was careful to say that the Bay Area fees - which amount to 4.4 cents per metric ton of greenhouse gases expelled - would not overlap with the state fees.

"We're going to work with the (Bay Area) district to make sure businesses aren't penalized," Nichols said.

Cap-and-trade

Measures contained in Wednesday's proposal varied from the small - such as specific tire inflation standards for heavy-duty trucks - to the large. One of the most important is the cap-and-trade system, which is designed to make burning fossil fuels pricey and reward investment in renewable energy. The system sets limits on carbon dioxide emissions and allows companies to trade carbon credits based on amount of production.

Regulators and lawmakers are working on a federal cap-and-trade system, Nichols said, but efforts are hampered by wide energy differences between regions. California is working with six other Western states and four Canadian provinces to create a regional carbon market.

While regulators work out how much of California's carbon to cover in the cap-and-trade system, some businesses - which emit a significant chunk of the state's carbon - are trying to do their part.

Officials at AMD, the Sunnyvale computer chipmaker that hosted Wednesday's conference, said it aims to further cut its emissions by increasing telecommuting and building more ecofriendly facilities.

The company cut its pollution by 50 percent over four years and recently built a campus in Texas fueled completely by wind power and methane from steer waste.

Such efforts pay the company back twofold, said Larry Vertal, senior strategist at AMD.

For one, it helps save the company electricity. Second, it keeps the company in good standing with its customers and potential employees.

"More and more, the best and the brightest minds - engineers, scientists - have broad concerns about the environment," Vertal said. "They only want to work for companies that are good global citizens."

California releases plan to cut greenhouse gases

By SAMANTHA YOUNG, Associated Press Writer

Modesto Bee and Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, October 16, 2008

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — To reach its global warming goals, California must cut greenhouse gas emissions by about four tons per person, which would require cleaner cars, more renewable energy and a cap on major polluters, according to a state plan released Wednesday.

It's the first comprehensive effort of any state to reduce greenhouse gases in the absence of federal regulation. The plan to be voted on by the California Air Resources Board in December builds upon an earlier draft on ways to meet the global warming law signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger two years ago.

"Despite a difficult economy, it is important that we move forward on our environmental goals, which is why I am pleased that in California we have put together a plan for reducing our greenhouse gas emissions that also boosts our economy," Schwarzenegger said in a statement.

The plan will be implemented over the next few years through lengthy regulations that haven't yet been written, so many details remain unknown. An analysis released by the board last month suggested California's economy would grow faster under the proposal than if the state did nothing to cut emissions blamed for global warming.

One of the most contentious proposals is a cap-and-trade program to help power plants, oil and gas refiners and other major polluters lower their carbon emissions. The idea is to allow businesses that cannot cut their emissions because of cost or technical hurdles to buy credits from cleaner businesses.

Many embrace a trading scheme as cost-effective, but some worry businesses could shirk their responsibilities and continue polluting the air. The latest plan suggests businesses could get some emission credits for free, but polluters eventually would have to buy into the market.

Local governments also will be asked to build residential developments near public transportation, shops and businesses in an effort to reduce the number of miles Californians drive.

Regulators said decisions would be made later. Air Resources Board Chairwoman Mary Nichols explained that regulators first wanted to think through the implications of such a plan before addressing the specifics.

"We're facing the reality at the moment of a very uncertain business climate," Nichols said.

Some businesses have criticized the board's analysis that California's economy would grow under the plan. They also say requiring companies to initially buy their way into a carbon trading market would amount to a tax on struggling businesses.

"The last thing California companies need in this challenging economic climate is billions in more taxes," Amisha Patel, a policy advocate at the California Chamber of Commerce, said in a statement.

"California is already one of the highest tax states in the country."

EPA tightens health standard for airborne lead

By DINA CAPPIELLO, Associated Press Writer

Modesto Bee and Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, October 16, 2008

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency is setting a new health standard for lead to slash the amount of the toxic metal in the nation's air by 90 percent.

EPA officials, who were under a federal court order to set a new standard by midnight Wednesday, said the new limit would better protect health, especially children.

"Our nation's air is cleaner today than just a generation ago, and last night I built upon this progress by signing the strongest air quality standards for lead in our nation's history," Stephen Johnson, the EPA administrator, said Thursday. "Thanks to this stronger standard, EPA will protect my children from remaining sources of airborne lead."

The new limit - 0.15 micrograms per cubic meter - is the first update to the lead standard since 1978, when it helped phase out leaded gasoline. It is ten times lower than the current standard, which was 1.5 micrograms per cubic meter.

The new standard announced on Thursday would require the 16,000 remaining sources of lead, including smelters, metal mines, and waste incinerators, to reduce their emissions.

Takoma Park Coalition Targets Leaf Blowers

*By Ann E. Marimow and Miranda S. Spivack, Washington Post Staff Writers
Washington Post, Thursday, October 16, 2008*

Takoma Park's citizen activists have a new, noisy target: pollution-producing leaf blowers.

A group of resident environmentalists this week called on city leaders to ban gas-powered blowers. The machines are not just a loud nuisance, according to the coalition of about 30 residents, but are a major source of air pollution.

In a letter to Mayor Bruce Williams, the coalition said the "costs -- to public health, the environment, and our quality of life -- far exceed real or perceived benefits."

The letter says that County Executive Isiah Leggett (D) has recommended that residents "stop using gasoline-powered lawn care equipment, one of the top contributors of ozone-causing pollutants." Advocates quote from a county pamphlet describing the impact of such equipment on the environment, in part because the small engines for blowers, lawn mowers and chain saws are "not controlled or maintained in the same way that engines in cars are" for emissions.

Leggett spokesman Patrick Lacefield said the brochure that the letter quotes predates Leggett's election as county executive.

"I don't think we're telling people to stop," he said. "I think we're giving people information and saying there are a range of things people can do to improve air quality when it comes to their lawns."

The effort to ban leaf blowers follows Takoma Park's long history of activism, most recently when the council passed a resolution opposing the production and sale of foie gras and its earlier call for store owners and residents to use cage-free eggs.

Advocates of the ban have asked that the council schedule a work session to create a strategy for going after the blowers. If they are successful, the letter says residents would switch to "alternative methods of lawn care." In other words, get out those rakes and brooms for gathering leaves.

Ban advocates include Steve Davies, who publishes an environmental newsletter, and Mike Tidwell, founder and director of Chesapeake Climate Action Network. Tidwell is also the founder of Citizens Against Lawn Mower Madness, a group that has tried to restrict the use of gas-powered mowers.

The mayor had not responded to the coalition's request.

The World

Roo-minating on Climate Change

Washington Post Thurs. Oct. 16, 2008

If Australians ate kangaroo meat rather than beef or lamb, their country's greenhouse gas emissions would drop, an industry group says. The burps and gas from cows and sheep are high

in methane; kangaroos produce very little. The Kangaroo Industry Association of Australia estimates that changing the population ratios could reduce emissions by 3 percent. Australia's per capita emissions from agriculture are six times the global average.

[Lodi News Sentinel, Guest Commentary, Thursday, October 16, 2008:](#)

Lodi is stagnating

Who are the people who are so anti-Wal-Mart? Are you so unsure of your position that you must remain anonymous or so myopic that you cannot see the empty storefronts in Lodi — and the Supercenter isn't here yet?

Lodi is stagnating. Go to adjacent cities and see how they are prospering. They want new business, Lodi leaders do not want new businesses to come here. Lodi will never have or support stores like Stockton's Stone Creek. You must grow or you die.

Have you heard of "brand loyalty?" The "quality stores" will keep their customers and other stores will compete or go out of business — a simple fact of life in the U.S. Have you noticed how few "quality stores" we have that are locally owned? Lodi has a Wal-Mart store now. Will the adding of grocery items create tremendous dislocation of businesses in Lodi?

How can this create a new traffic jam just a block from the existing store? Do you truly believe that there will be such a tremendous increase in their business that there will be new air pollution? Where do those future shoppers go now? Stockton. Shouldn't they be given the opportunity to shop locally? What about the tax revenue that now goes out of town?

As to increased crime — a weak argument. Stockton has had a major crime problem long before Wal-Mart and urban decay can be seen in Lodi without the Supercenter. The same goes for wages paid to area employees. Other than "union shop" businesses, check to see what "local" businesses are paying their employees. You will probably find Wal-Mart is no worse. Why do so many people stand in long lines to get a job at any new Wal-Mart and just how does increasing the size of the existing Wal-Mart increase unemployment? Lodi would get a shot in the arm with a new employment opportunity.

You also have an empty argument that Wal-Mart will hurt our wine country destination image. They are here now. You make the grandiose statement that this will hurt the redevelopment of the Eastside. If the customer is there, business will come to supply the need. How does enlarging their existing store "damage our quality of life" or "cause reduction in property value?" Such statements, as with most other statements, are simply ludicrous.

William Baker, Lodi