

Air District funds clean air technology

Business Journal staff

The (Fresno) Business Journal, Thursday, Dec. 16, 2010

Technologies that could improve the Valley's air quality were awarded \$1.2 million from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District as part of a program to encourage innovative ideas to reduce emissions.

With an initial \$900,000 from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced in June, the Technology Advancement Program (TAP) is now awarding six proposals for its first round of funding:

- Engine, Fuel, and Emissions Engineering, Inc – \$151,499 to demonstrate an improved compact selective catalytic-reduction system for use on dairy biogas system
- Tenneco Automotive Operating Company, Inc. – \$300,000 to demonstrate a hydrocarbon lean NOX catalyst system in off-road construction engines
- Terex Corp. – \$258,000 to convert a wheel loader to plug-in hybrid operation, and identify fuel savings and emission reductions
- City of Fresno – \$140,000 to retrofit parallel hydraulic hybrid drive trains onto one existing and one new liquefied natural gas-powered refuse trucks
- Solar Storage Company – \$250,000 to demonstrate a renewable solar power-generation system as an alternative option for remote, diesel- powered, agricultural irrigation-pumping systems
- FlexEnergy – \$100,501 to demonstrate an ultra-low NOX system capable of accepting low-quality gas

The air district's governing board also authorized an additional \$1.4 million in funding to be available in 2011, including \$400,000 from the EPA. The District will open another competitive RFP early next year.

"Our hope is that, with this investment in the Valley's economy, we will be able to promote the area as a top choice for green jobs and businesses," said Seyed Sadredin, the District's executive director and air pollution control officer, in a statement.

District Board Awards \$1.2 million For New Technologies

New grant program encourages emission-reduction innovation

The Taft Independent, Friday, Dec. 17, 2010

The Valley Air District's Governing Board has awarded \$1.2 million in the first round of funding for new technologies that will reduce emissions in innovative ways.

The Technology Advancement Program (TAP) awards funding for projects in renewable energy, waste to energy and mobile sources. Six proposals, submitted during a competitive Request for Proposals process last summer, were approved at the Dec. 16 board meeting:

- Engine, Fuel, and Emissions Engineering, Inc - \$151,499 to demonstrate an improved compact selective catalytic-reduction system for use on a dairy biogas system
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"This program is a valuable tool to stimulate innovation in ways that will directly help to improve the Valley's air quality, and to also support the Valley's dynamic and growing alternative energy-development community," said Samir Sheikh, the District's director of Strategies and Incentives.

Complete information and guidelines for TAP are available at http://www.valleyair.org/Grant_Programs/TAP/tap_idx.htm.

For more information about the Air District, call a regional office in Modesto (209) 557-6400, Fresno (559) 230-6000, or Bakersfield (661) 392-5500.

Appellate Court Upholds Air District Development Regulation

The Valley Voice, Fri., Dec. 17, 2010

Tulare County - In the legal battle over the Valley Air District's landmark regulation of development-associated air pollution, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeal last week upheld the Air District's right to regulate indirect sources of pollution.

The suit, filed by the National Association of Homebuilders in June 2007, alleged that the Air District's pioneering regulation, which establishes development fees for air-pollution mitigation, is pre-empted by the federal Clean Air Act.

The U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California ruled against the NAHB in September 2008, and the developers' group appealed the decision.

The Court of Appeal's ruling last week affirmed that the Clean Air Act permits the Air District to regulate aspects of land use critical to air quality.

"We are gratified by this ruling," said Seyed Sadredin, the District's air pollution control officer and executive director. "We are eager to continue working with Valley developers to clean up our air."

Rule 9510, Indirect Source Review, requires developers of projects over certain sizes in the eight-county air basin to quantify the emissions produced by their projects in both the construction and habitation phases and mitigate their emissions either by building in air-friendly components to their projects, such as sidewalks, electric plug-in stations, green space and other features that encourage alternatives to driving, or through the payment of mitigation fees.

Development sprawl and its negative impact on air quality is especially pertinent in the Valley, Sadredin said.

"We have significant natural challenges to our air quality in the Valley by virtue of our geography and climate. Piling on our historic tendency to sprawl has only posed another obstacle to clean air. Local developers in the San Joaquin Valley should be commended for their innovation and cooperation in complying with this rule despite legal challenges by the national association," Sadredin said.

TID's Almond 2 Power Plant gets go-ahead from Energy Commission

Staff Reports

Turlock Journal, Friday, Dec. 17, 2010

The California Energy Commission (CEC) approved the construction of TID's proposed Almond 2 Power Plant (A2PP) with a 5-0 vote on Wednesday.

The state-of-the-art, natural-gas fired, simple-cycle peaking power generation facility, will be located next to the existing Almond Power Plant in Ceres, California. The plant will utilize the first 3 commercial units of the new General Electric LM6000PG series gas turbines.

"A2PP will add 174 megawatts to TID's current generating capability. This project is important to TID and our community and represents about 150 jobs at peak as well as other short and long term economic benefits to the area," stated Brian LaFollette, interim assistant general manager of Power Supply.

The district hopes to use the new power plant, sited adjacent to the existing 48-megawatt Almond 1 Power Plant on Crows Landing Road near Ceres, to reduce emissions, provide protection against power outages, and to assist with meeting balancing authority operations. As one of five state-approved balancing authorities, the district must guarantee sufficient reserve generation capacity to meet grid demands, currently forcing TID to run existing generators below maximum potentials.

The Almond 2 Power Plant will use natural gas technology to generate electricity in a manner that will minimize the use of fuel, emissions of criteria pollutants, and potential effects on ambient air quality. The power plant will also use recycled water from the City of Ceres' Wastewater Treatment Plant for the project's process water needs.

The application for construction was submitted to the CEC in May 2009. On site work will begin in early 2011 with commercial operation expected within 12 months of the start date.

Chem Waste tops state toxics list

By Seth Nidever, staff writer

Hanford Sentinel, Saturday, Dec. 18, 2010

Chemical Waste Management Inc. landfills near Kettleman City held far and away the biggest concentration of toxic materials in California in 2009, according to a report released Thursday by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Called a toxic inventory, the report lists the biggest locations of toxic materials in the state. It includes both industrial sources that produce toxic materials and facilities like Chem Waste that are licensed to dispose it.

Chem Waste's Kettleman Hills Facility dominated the list with 14.7 million pounds of toxics, including everything from medical waste to material from military facilities outside the lower 48 states.

Other disposal sites on the list – Clean Harbors in Kern County and Quemetco Inc. in Southern California – were tiny by comparison. Each had less than 2 million pounds of toxic materials. Five out of the top 10 generators of toxic material were oil refineries in Benicia, Rodeo, El Segundo, Carson and Richmond.

Chem Waste's Kettleman Hills site has been the center of intense controversy for months. Activists have blamed it for a rash of health problems in the tiny community of Kettleman City, including a cluster of birth defects.

However, a recent California Department of Public Health report said it could not identify a single source of the birth defects. Chem Waste officials cited the report as evidence of the safety of their facility. They have consistently said the landfills don't pose any threat to the community's air and water.

EPA's report comes as the facility is considering whether to grant Chem Waste a permit to build a new toxic waste landfill at the Kettleman site. It would replace an existing toxic waste landfill that is nearing the end of its usable life. The new landfill would ensure that Chem Waste would continue taking toxic waste for decades.

California backs off strict diesel rules

Wyatt Buchanan, Chronicle Sacramento Bureau
In the S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, December 18, 2010

Sacramento - -- California's air regulators significantly scaled back the nation's toughest diesel pollution rules Friday, giving owners of trucks and other diesel-powered machines more time and more options to reduce their emissions.

The changes, which were prompted by the economic downturn that has idled many trucks and construction machines, also came after the California Air Resources Board acknowledged that some of the original rules had been based on a major miscalculation of how much pollution the engines produce.

At the all-day meeting of the board, equipment owners pleaded for relief, with some calling for the regulations to be suspended altogether.

Several environmental and health organizations, however, questioned whether easing the regulations would harm air quality and public health. Students from schools in Oakland and Richmond implored the air board to keep the rules, saying their friends and family members have asthma and other diseases related to diesel pollution.

The board voted 10-0 in favor of the changes.

"This is the culmination of a couple of years worth of work on adapting our diesel regulations, which are very aggressive, ... to the realities of the current economic situation," said board

Chairwoman Mary Nichols, who noted that the construction industry has borne a significant share of the losses in the economy.

Mike Kennedy, general counsel for Associated General Contractors of America, which worked closely with the air board on the changes, called them "something that is often discussed but rarely achieved and that's ... a win-win."

The Air Resources Board considered changes to five different diesel regulations, which cover big rigs and buses, off-road machines and vehicles used largely in construction, drayage trucks and other machines. The regulations originally were approved between 2006 and 2008.

Economy affects pollution

The amendments to most of the regulations, such as the on-road rules, stem from reductions in truck use because of the weakened economy, which has meant a corresponding drop in air pollution. However, the changes for off-road equipment were largely because of an overestimation by air board scientists of pollution emitted from the engines.

The estimate of nitrous oxide emissions was overstated by 340 percent, a miscalculation The Chronicle first reported in October.

To fix that, the Air Resources Board voted to delay the requirements for all fleets of equipment for four years, removing a requirement to retrofit machines, giving extra credits for engines that have done early retrofits and expanding the number of vehicles with "low-use" engines.

For on-road big-rig trucks, the board voted to delay when trucks need to install filters for particulate matter, to delay when some trucks have to be replaced by as many as eight years and exempted smaller vehicles from some requirements.

Companies affected by the rules will save \$4.8 billion, according to air board staff.

Praise and objections

Many of the owners and operators of diesel engines vehicles praised the board for the amendments to the regulations, though they said they still objected to them overall.

Susan Jones, owner and operator of D&S Trucking, a small Castro Valley dump truck company, said her business is down 88 percent and asked the board for more time to comply with the rules.

"I really, really believe you guys have to give us mom-and-pop operations, us low-mileage guys, more time. Just to make our house payments, please give us time," she said.

Changing the regulations will have myriad impacts, including for companies that make emission filters. Some vehicles now are exempt from having to purchase those, and manufacturers of the filters warned that the change could put different people out of work. Others who had made changes in their equipment raised concerns that they were at a disadvantage for spending money to make changes while some of their competitors did not.

The board gave some additional credits, such as extending the time companies have to comply with the rules, to those who have already taken steps to meet the regulations.

Serious concerns

A coalition of environmental and public health groups submitted a letter saying they had "serious concern" about the changes.

"The rule changes as proposed go beyond what is necessary in the short term and reduce near-term health benefits," the groups wrote. They also noted that low-income people of color are the most likely to live along truck routes and near freeways where pollution from diesel engines is highest.

Several lawmakers, including the leader of the Latino legislative caucus, wrote to the board with similar concerns.

Nichols said any reductions in pollution would then most benefit the people living in those areas.

Although some of the changes were made because of the scientific inaccuracy of earlier proposals, board members did not address that in their comments.

The air board has been in a difficult period, not only because of that miscalculation, but also because an air board staffer who wrote a study on premature deaths caused by diesel pollution was found to have faked his scientific credentials.

Tony Luiz, owner of T&L Trucking near Watsonville, expressed anger about those problems, saying it amounted to corruption.

"This board has cost billions of dollars to companies that have already retrofitted and updated, for garbage information" that the board used to make earlier decisions, he said.

California eases diesel soot crackdown

The construction industry gets a break, but the rules remain the nation's toughest.

By Margot Roosevelt, staff writer

L.A. Times, Sat., Dec. 18, 2010

Sacramento — California regulators on Friday delayed the state's pioneering crackdown on diesel soot from trucks and construction equipment, bowing to industry demands for relief during a stubborn economic recession.

The newly relaxed rules "balance the needs of citizens for cleaner air," said Mary D. Nichols, chairman of the California Air Resources Board. "And they provide meaningful relief to industries that are very hard hit."

Even with the roll-back, the rules are the toughest in the nation and will cost the trucking and construction industries an estimated \$3.8 billion. They will slash diesel soot emissions by half in four years and by 70% over the next decade, Nichols said.

Under the revised standards, passed unanimously by the 11-member board, filters must be installed in nearly all 250,000 of the state's heaviest trucks must install filters by 2014, a year later than first envisioned. The original rules, passed in 2008, would also have required filters on 150,000 medium-weight trucks. Under the new rule, however, the state's fleet of medium-weight trucks, however, must be retired when they are 20 years old, under the new rule. By 2023, no trucks older than the 2010 model year — which are 90% cleaner than older models because of due to new federal engine standards — may operate in the state.

Filters must also be installed in the state's standard-sized school buses by 2014, the board said.

The revised rules require no filters on construction equipment, including back hoes, graders, large forklifts and front loaders, but they do set a 2023 retirement date for more than two-thirds of the 150,000-vehicle diesel construction fleet. The board acknowledged last year that it had overestimated the emissions from off-road equipment.

California, which has some of the nation's dirtiest air and high rates of asthma and other pulmonary ailments, is the only state to require filters for existing big rigs and the retirement of older trucks. That effort has sparked fierce opposition from truckers across the state.

Federal standards apply only to new engines, but California is allowed to enact stricter rules because its air pollution laws were in effect before federal clean air legislation was enacted more than three decades ago.

In a seven-hour hearing, environmentalists and public health groups mostly greeted the changes with resignation, acknowledging that the recession has slashed emissions in the last three years by idling equipment in the economic downturn.

The roll-back "will save companies money," said Don Anair, senior engineer at the Union of Concerned Scientists. "But communities will have to wait longer for protection from toxic diesel pollution."

Truckers and construction company officials mostly praised the new rules, which will cost 60% less than the original regulations. "Four of every 10 construction workers in California have lost their jobs," said Michael Kennedy, general counsel of the Associated General Contractors of America. "It is difficult to revisit decisions already made. This is an example of good government."

The air board's crackdown on diesel has had strong political support, especially in such neighborhoods as those around the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, where diesel fumes

are blamed for high rates of asthma and cancer.

Former California Senate majority leader Richard Polanco testified on behalf of the Legislature's 23-member Latino caucus and several other legislators, saying that the rules for construction equipment should not be rolled back and noting that it would inflict harm on companies that make filters.

"I understand there is an economic recession," he said. "Diesel is a toxic air contaminant [and] the proposed changes go in the wrong direction. We should protect green jobs, not just one industry."

Jared Blumenfeld, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's regional administrator, expressed concern last month that the rollback of diesel rules would make it difficult to meet federal air quality standards for the San Joaquin Valley and the South Coast district, which includes Orange County and parts of Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

But air board staff said the new rules would allow those regions, the state's most polluted, to meet air quality standards by the federal deadline of 2014, thus avoiding punitive action, including the withholding of highway money, that could result from violating federal caps.

Among the more than 100 witnesses at Friday's hearing, however, many noted that an economic upturn probably would put more diesel equipment back into operation, frustrating those expectations.

"The recession-induced reductions in truck pollution are almost imperceptible in the most populous area, Southern California," said Diane Bailey, a Natural Resources Defense Fund scientist. "When the economy does recover, we'll see a spike in diesel emissions as a dirty, older fleet goes back to work, since investments in clean, new equipment will have slowed."

Many of the drivers and owners of smaller trucks who testified, however, said their business was down by more than half. Many said they were close to bankruptcy and could not afford to buy filters or new trucks, even under a relaxed schedule.

"To afford new trucks, we'd have to cancel our employees' health insurance," said Ed Walker of Robinson Enterprises, who operates logging trucks in Nevada City, Calif.

Calif. gives business time to meet diesel rules

By Jason Dearen, Associated Press

Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, Dec. 17, 2010

Sacramento — Business owners will have more time to comply with California's tough diesel emissions standards for trucks, school buses and construction equipment under more relaxed rules that air quality officials adopted on Friday.

The Air Resources Board passed the regulations unanimously, saying businesses struggling during a recession need more time to replace or upgrade aging equipment.

Clean air advocates countered that the move only ensured more harmful soot would be emitted into California's air.

"The board is trying to balance the needs of our citizens for cleaner air with the state of the economy," said Mary Nichols, board chairman.

The board has acknowledged its staff had overestimated pollution created by construction equipment, buses and trucks. It said there are about 200,000 fewer construction vehicles in

California than the board initially thought, mostly due to fewer vehicles in use because of the recession.

The amended rules would still achieve the same amount of diesel emissions reduction over time, but with a \$1.5 billion for those being regulated, Nichols said.

Soot from diesel exhaust is associated with a number of ailments, including cancer and heart disease. The state's regulations seek to reduce emissions 50 percent by 2014, with a 70 percent reduction by 2020.

Still, clean air advocates were not satisfied.

"We've come to expect California to lead the nation on clean air. In this case, it's leading us in the wrong direction," said Frank O'Donnell, president of Clean Air Watch in Washington, D.C. "It is simply shifting the costs to those who breathe the dirty air from diesel engines. They will now pay more in health care costs."

California's 2007 off-road diesel emissions rules require tractors, bulldozers, pavers and other types of equipment to be replaced or retrofitted over the next 15 years.

The improvements were originally scheduled to begin in March 2010 for larger fleets, with smaller fleets starting later. The new rules push the start date back to 2014, giving companies more time to start using cleaner equipment.

"The decision to significantly revise the state's off-road diesel emissions rules gives hope to thousands of construction workers fearful for their job security while safeguarding California's air quality," said Brian Turmail, a spokesman for the Associated General Contractors of America.

For big rigs, trucks and buses, the new rules give owners an extra year until 2012 to install particulate filters. Also, by 2023 the state's fleet will be required to have engines made no earlier than 2010.

Also, the new rules give owners of large school buses another year to install filters, but require smaller buses, mostly used for special needs children and previously exempt, to install filters.

The new rules also exempt 150,000 lighter trucks previously covered under the regulations, but owners are still required to replace lighter trucks when they are 20 years old.

Clean air advocates said the rules would likely effect air quality most in low income neighborhoods.

"The brunt of the pollution burden will be felt by the low-income communities living near major highways, agricultural areas and industrial centers," said Elizabeth Jonasson, the Coalition for Clean Air's campaign and outreach associate in the San Joaquin Valley."

The air board is meeting about the diesel rules one day after approving the nation's most extensive system of financial incentives for power plants, refineries and other major polluters to emit fewer greenhouse gases.

Calif. regulators OK major greenhouse gas rules

By Jason Dearen, Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle, Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, Dec. 17, 2010

Sacramento — Hoping other states will follow suit, California regulators overwhelmingly approved the nation's most extensive system giving owners of power plants, refineries and other major polluters financial incentives to emit fewer greenhouse gases.

The Air Resources Board voted 9-1 Thursday to pass the key piece of California's 2006 climate law—called AB32.

"We're inventing this," said Mary Nichols, chairwoman of the state's air quality board. "There is still going to be quite a bit of action needed before it becomes operational."

Officials said they hope that other states will follow the lead of the world's eighth largest economy. State officials also are discussing plans to link the new system with similar ones under way or being planned in Canada, Europe and Asia.

California is trying to "fill the vacuum created by the failure of Congress to pass any kind of climate or energy legislation for many years now," said Nichols.

A standing-room only board chambers featured testimony from more than 170 witnesses Thursday. Outside the chambers, a few climate change skeptics held signs reading "Global Warming: Science by Homer Simpson."

Some businesses that would fall under the new rules say the system could dampen California's already flagging economy, complicate lawmakers' efforts to close a \$28.1 billion revenue shortfall and lead to an increase in the price of electricity.

The rate increases, however, would still need approval from the state.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger told the board he is sensitive to the recession, but argued that many of the new jobs being created under the system are in the clean technology industry.

"The real jobs we're creating right now are green jobs. Since 2006 or so green jobs have been created 10 times faster than in any other sector, so it's also an economic plus," he said.

But he said reducing greenhouse gas pollution is not just about climate change, but about human health and national security.

"I despise the fact that we send \$1 billion a year to foreign places for our oil and to places that hate us. We send this money to people that hate us and that are organizing terrorists and trying to blow up our country," he said.

Supporters say the system will help spur economic recovery and innovation, pushing business to invest in clean technologies.

They say the billions of dollars the state collects in the system could help fund clean air programs and help offset any increases in utility rates. Details of the uses of these new funds is still uncertain.

California has already enacted the strictest climate-related regulations in the country involving renewable energy mandates for utilities, tighter fuel-efficiency standards for automobiles and low-carbon fuel standards.

The state's landmark climate law had a Jan. 1, 2011, deadline for devising and enacting the so-called cap-and-trade system.

Here's how it would broadly work:

A company that produces pollution, such as a utility or a refinery, buys a permit from the state that allows it to send a specified amount of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the air each year.

Those permits could then be bought and sold by the polluters in a marketplace.

If a company in Fresno is 15 percent under its pollution allowance, it can sell the unused portion to a company in Long Beach that has exceeded its quota. The Fresno company gets to keep the money.

Polluters can even make a profit, if the marketplace sets a price above the initial cost of the permit.

The lone dissenting board member, Dr. John Telles, said he had concerns that the new market created by the regulation was too vulnerable to cheating.

"We're potentially vulnerable here to be manipulated," he said. "And I don't see enough safeguards in the design of the market."

The board's staff said it would be working on market issues in the coming year before the launch of the program, but recognized that they were creating something that had not been tried before.

Adding another wrinkle, a company that exceeds its allowance can also buy what are called "offsets." These can be bought by companies with forestry or other projects that reduce greenhouse gases.

Those companies can sell those to polluters in the marketplace, also at a profit.

Under the new California rules, regulators would enforce limits on heat-trapping gas emissions beginning in 2012, eventually including 85 percent of the state's worst polluters.

The amount of allowed emissions would be reduced over time, and the regulations would expand in 2015 to include refineries and fuel distributors, such as oil companies.

The cap would reach its lowest level in 2020, when California wants its greenhouse gas emissions reduced to 1990 levels.

Ninety percent of the allowances would be free in the first years of the program to give industry time to upgrade to cleaner equipment or account for increased future costs as the cap tightens.

Over time, as the cap gets lower and fewer allowances are available, costs would rise.

"The idea is to incentivize clean technology over fossil fuels by putting a price on carbon," said Jon Costantino, a senior adviser at a Sacramento law firm who formerly served as the climate change planning manager at the Air Resources Board.

Business groups raised concerns that the board had not yet given hard details about what each facility's allowances would be.

"It's crucial for companies to know what their compliance requirements are going to be far in advance," said Dorothy Rothrock of the California Manufacturers and Technology Association.

"There are definitely going to be some costs incurred right up front for these companies," she said.

State officials say they had to act, because of years of delays in Washington. "The goal of (the law's) authors in 2006 was to lead by example, and being a leader you have to bring others along with you," Nichols said.

A bill to place a limit on the amount of greenhouse gases nationwide narrowly passed the U.S. House in 2009, died in the Senate because all Republicans and some Democrats from coal- and industry-heavy states balked about how it would raise electricity bills.

Obama, who made the climate bill the centerpiece of his Democratic agenda, pulled support for it after the midterm elections put Republicans in control of the House. The president said he would be looking at other ways to address climate change.

While the Environmental Protection Agency has proposed the first-ever rules to reduce greenhouse gases from large industrial polluters, the GOP, with some support from Democrats, vows in 2011 to block it from moving ahead with the regulations.

California's system, however, could end up being linked to ones being developed in other countries. State officials are talking with the European Union as well as provinces in China and Canada to link systems.

In the U.S., New Mexico narrowly approved its own cap-and-trade program last month and OK'd the state's participation in a regional market. There is another market in the works in the Midwest. Another program exists in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Friday, Dec. 17, 2010:](#)

There was Fresno news in the cap-and-trade vote Thursday

By Mark Grossi

You may have heard the California Air Resources Board agreed late Thursday to the controversial cap-and-trade approach to curbing carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas. But you may not have heard the Fresno news in this story.

There was only one "no" vote on the issue: John Telles, the Fresno cardiologist who also sits on the local air board.

Telles said the policy would not protect low-income residents from energy price hikes, according to the Los Angeles Times. He also reportedly had concerns about the carbon trading market that would be established.

Which lead us to an explanation of the cap-and-trade policy.

The cap: The state sets a cap on carbon dioxide emissions from large emitters -- such as power plants, oil refineries and heavy industries. I won't describe the technicalities in the cap, but it will be lowered each year until 2020 when a 15% reduction should be achieved. That's the magic number in California's climate-change law, AB 32.

The trade: Here's where the so-called carbon market enters. If a company can't achieve the reduction in certain years, it can buy reductions from other companies that are ahead of schedule.

The state will have a quarterly auction where companies will be able to buy such reductions.

More than 150 people spoke about this policy on Thursday. Many details still have to be worked out. You haven't heard the last of it. Not by a long sh

[Bakersfield Californian editorial, Saturday, Dec. 18, 2010:](#)

Does dirty air put us on road to autism?

We in the Central Valley know all too well about the problems associated with air pollution -- respiratory ailments and, as the California Air Resources Board maintains, thousands of premature deaths annually.

New research suggests yet another reason to fear our notoriously smoggy air: autism. Air pollution might be a factor in causing the childhood development syndrome, according to a study by the Saba Research Institute of Children's Hospital in Los Angeles.

We'd be interested to know if a similar correlation could be made here in Kern, home to some of the nation's most contaminated air.

Researchers theorize that babies born to mothers who live close to freeways -- within 1,000 feet or so -- have twice the risk of autism, based on evaluation of cases in the interstate-heavy Sacramento, San Francisco and Los Angeles areas.

The freeway theory remained valid even after controlling for exposure to cigarette smoke, ethnicity, education and the mothers' ages.

Curiously, a similar link couldn't be established for proximity to major roads. Researchers speculate that vehicle emissions might be chemically different or in lower concentrations than near freeways.

We don't have the number of freeways found in those major metropolitan areas, but air pollution is a fact of daily life in Kern, especially in the dog days of summer when thick, brown layers of smog hover over the region for weeks and prompt health alerts, burn bans and safety violations.

Prolonged exposure to carbon monoxide, particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide, ozone and other airborne pollutants have been identified as harmful to fetuses. We inhale loads of those chemicals here, so it doesn't seem far-fetched to wonder what kind of damage we might be doing to our unborn.

Some, including the environmental investigation arm of the state Department of Health Services, aren't convinced of the new study's link just yet. But the research represents one more reason for us to pay attention to our environment.