

San Joaquin Valley business owners need to get educated on AB 617 sooner rather than later

By Lois Henry

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A number of people have been wondering what I'm up to in my new job as advocacy director for BizFed Central Valley.

Short answer: A LOT.

I know some of you are asking, "What's a BizFed?" so I've conveniently put together a short explainer in the side bar to this article.

But I want to talk about AB 617.

If you own a business in the San Joaquin Valley and haven't heard of this new law, believe me, you will.

For background, AB 617 — the Community Air Protection Program — was passed July 2017 as part of the cap and trade extension package.

AB 617 requires special air monitoring in communities that are deemed to have "high cumulative air pollution" and corresponding emission-reduction plans.

The California Air Resources Board, which is in charge of overseeing AB 617, is currently writing the "blueprint" for how to implement the law. The final plan is due Oct. 1 of this year.

As you all know, the devil is in the details, meaning this blueprint is of vital importance for valley businesses.

One extremely unsettling area concerns land use planning.

Though AB 617 and the ARB have zero authority to jump into that realm, the blueprint refers to land use planning several times as an area ripe for finding ways to reduce emissions.

Potentially, that means the ARB wants to find ways to stop or control housing development, business construction and/or expansion.

Apparently, ARB staffers closely watched the recent vote in Arvin where the city council curtailed oil development in that city.

Beyond that, the blueprint is extremely vague — frighteningly so.

This is called the "Community Air Protection Program" so community groups are being given authority — and a lot of money from cap and trade funds — to do their own monitoring.

But there are no standards in the blueprint for how that monitoring should be done.

What equipment will be used? How will it be calibrated? What are the protocols for data collection and interpretation? Exactly how will that data be used?

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will be tasked with overseeing this part of AB 617. But how it will reconcile data from these community groups with its own data, collected under very strict and transparent protocols, is unclear.

BizFed Central Valley has asked the California Air Resources Board to require community monitoring data to adhere to the same protocols as those used by the air district.

But the blueprint omissions go on.

The document doesn't even include a list of which air constituents are under consideration.

Ozone? Particulate matter? Greenhouse gases (for which there are no established health standards)?

The law states that community monitoring should be for what are known as "criteria pollutants" and toxic air contaminants, which are already monitored valleywide by the air district.

BizFed Central Valley's position is that the blueprint should stick to those criteria pollutants and not allow monitoring to spread to include other constituents for which there are no accepted health data.

But when it comes to the emission reduction plan portion of the blueprint, things get even hazier.

It suggests emission-reduction plans will be measured against "health outcomes."

What does that mean? The blueprint offers no clues.

The air district, earlier this summer, recommended south-central Fresno, northeast Bakersfield and Shafter as the initial communities to be monitored in this region.

So, under the blueprint, would emission reduction goals be tied to "health outcomes" of people living in those areas? Working there? Both? What diseases would be under consideration? Cancer? Asthma? Heart failure? How much would lifestyle and genetic predisposition factor in?

Again, the blueprint has no guidance.

And there is no time limit listed in the blueprint.

BizFed Central Valley has asked ARB for definitive goals with time limits for emissions reduction plans.

And we've asked that valley businesses — which will be the ones paying for all this — be brought into the planning process.

These emission reduction plans could (and likely will) affect everything, from heavy equipment yards to restaurant charbroilers.

There's much more but the bottom line here is that San Joaquin Valley business owners need to get educated on AB 617 sooner rather than later.

Businesses must speak out at air district and ARB meetings (see sidebar for two upcoming meetings).

And they must engage local policy makers.

Now.

Lois Henry is the advocacy director of BizFed Central Valley.

Grant funding available for valley farmers

By Cassandra Melching

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Kern County's nutrient-rich soils make it a prime region for producing the many crops that contribute to the valley's role in supplying food for the nation. Technology advancements in the agriculture business are rapidly rising and making farmer's more efficient in their daily duties and operations. Not only are these advancements capable of creating better sustainability, but they can also help in pollution reduction.

With thousands of Kern County acres used for farming, there are thousands of pieces of heavy equipment operated daily to maintain crops, fields, orchards and overall day-to-day business practices. Old tractor engines can emit up to 10 times the amount of air-polluting emissions when compared to newer advanced models.

Over the past 10 years, public and private investments in clean air projects through voluntary incentive grants have dramatically increased. This reflects the ongoing commitment of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (Air District), businesses, farmers and valley residents in making clean-air investments that improve the quality of life for all.

Funding from the Air District grant programs play a critical role in the valley by helping to reduce emissions and health risks that can occur from daily agricultural operations.

Kern County farmers are encouraged to take advantage of the robust grant programs offered by the Air District. The Air District is currently accepting applications for agricultural equipment such as tractors, heavy-duty diesel trucks and stationary pumps. Replacing diesel-powered stationary agricultural pump

engines with new diesel engines or electric motors may reduce or eliminate permit requirements. The following funding opportunities are available:

Ag Tractor Replacement

Tractor must operate annually 75 percent within California and 50 percent within the Air District. For an old tractor, it must currently be in use, in operational condition, horsepower rating of 25 or greater and be an uncontrolled (tier 0) engine, tier 1 or tier 2. New tractors must have a current model year emissions engine (tier 4) and serve the same function and perform the same work equivalent as the old tractor.

Truck Replacement

Funding is available for replacement of medium- and heavy-duty trucks. Trucks must be owned and operated for the past 24 months, must be in compliance with the California Air Resource Board's Truck and Bus Regulation and the truck must operate annually 75 percent within California and 50 percent within the Air District boundaries.

Agricultural and Off-Road Equipment Repower

Funding is available for diesel repower of agricultural and off-road, self-propelled equipment, up to 85 percent for repower costs. Eligible equipment may include scrapers, dozers, backhoes, balers, combines, excavators, pavers and rollers.

Stationary Agricultural Irrigation Pumps

Funding is available for the following categories:

- Diesel tier 3 going to tier 4
- Diesel tier 3 or 4 going to electric

Funding amounts are based on a dollar per horsepower of the new engine motor, not to exceed 85 percent of the eligible costs.

For more information on these grants, visit www.valleyair.org/grants and click on "Business" or call 559-230-5800 to speak to a representative.

Cassandra Melching is an Outreach & Communications Representative for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.