

Business, labor groups propose environmental act changes

Staff reports

L.A. Times, Monday, Aug. 20, 2012

A coalition of business and labor groups is proposing changes to California's landmark environmental law, saying it is time to modernize a 40-year-old measure that is often used to block even so-called green development.

At a Sacramento press conference Monday, representatives of the coalition outlined a proposal that they said would maintain the California Environmental Quality act as "the state environmental law" but eliminate regulatory redundancy and limit legal challenges to "real" environmental lawsuits. Currently, organizations can challenge projects on non-environmental grounds, such as effects on the aesthetics of a neighborhood, the group said.

Those challenges, the group said, are costing the state revenue and jobs.

Carl Guardino, president and CEO of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, said the proposal was about "making sure a great law is no longer abused."

In a letter to Gov. Jerry Brown and legislative leaders, the coalition said the proposed changes would preserve the original intent of the law: environmental protection.

"We reject the notion promoted by some that any and all CEQA modernization attempts are automatically an attack on the environment," the group wrote. "This all-or-nothing posturing is what is preventing California from moving forward with environmental protection policies that foster -- instead of inhibit -- responsible job creation, economic growth and community renewal."

Elements of the coalition's plan resemble a proposal that alarmed environmentalists and some labor unions last week. Some of those groups found Monday's proposal equally unnerving.

"This bill will kill CEQA, not reform it," said David Pettit, a senior attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The latest proposal would eliminate CEQA review for projects that comply with local planning and zoning codes. Pettit said many communities have "low or outdated planning and development standards" and that residents who live in those areas would lose the ability to ask for measures to mitigate things like traffic and air pollution.

The proposal's legislative prospects are unclear, but Assembly Speaker John A. Pérez (D-Los Angeles) said last week that he opposed a similar approach. Nevertheless, Pérez said "regulatory reform" -- including CEQA changes -- was a priority for him in the final two weeks of the legislative session.

On Monday, Senate leader Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento) said he is "always open to discussion" but would want to see specific CEQA proposals before taking a position.

Air alert canceled after conditions improve

By Jim Guy, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Monday, Aug. 20, 2012

A Pacific low-pressure front pushing into the San Joaquin Valley is producing cooler temperatures and better air quality this week, according to the National Weather Service and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

An air alert called by the pollution district has been canceled because of the improved conditions. Air alerts are called when high temperatures, increased emissions and stagnant air flow increase ozone formation and put the Central Valley at risk for exceeding the 1-hour health-based ozone standard. Exceeding that standard triggers a \$22 million federal penalty paid for by businesses and drivers.

The forecast calls for a high Monday of 97, a low Monday night of 67 and a high Tuesday of 93. Temperatures in the low 90s are expected through the week.

Air Alert in S.J. Valley canceled

Stockton Record, Tuesday, Aug. 21, 2012

San Joaquin Valley air quality officials canceled an Air Alert on Monday as conditions improved.

Officials attributed the improvement to lower temperatures and to Valley residents driving less after the alert was announced Friday.

Air Alerts are called when high ozone pollutions threaten public health and endanger the Valley's effort to meet standard. The Valley is paying \$29 million for any year it fails to meet that standard. Air Alerts call on the public to limit driving.

Second day of air alert canceled

Central Valley Business Times, Monday, Aug. 20, 2012

Air quality in the San Joaquin Valley has improved enough Monday, that the season's first air alert is being canceled Monday instead of Tuesday as originally planned.

Improving weather conditions and action taken by Valley residents to reduce air pollution are credited by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Air Alerts are called when the Valley experiences conditions such as increased emissions, high temperatures and stagnant air flow that lead to ozone formation. These periods have been correlated with back-to-school traffic.

High ozone levels put the Valley at risk for exceeding the one-hour health-based ozone standard that, in turn, triggers an annual \$29 million federal penalty. This penalty is paid by Valley businesses failing to use the best available emissions control technology and Valley drivers via a \$12 addition to their DMV registration.