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Jerry Brown will sign bills extending fees, incentives to reduce emissions

By David Siders

SAN FRANCISCO - Gov. Jerry Brown said today that he will sign legislation extending a fee on vehicle registrations and tire sales in California to pay for programs designed to reduce emissions and promote alternative fuels.

Assembly Bill 8, by Assemblyman Henry Perea, D-Fresno, will extend until 2024 a \$3 increase in vehicle registration fees scheduled to expire in 2016.

Brown also said he will sign legislation providing money to the California Air Resources Board for programs to encourage the use of zero-emission and hybrid vehicles. Senate Bill 359, by Sen. Ellen Corbett, D-San Leandro, includes \$20 million for rebates to Californians who purchase a plug-in hybrid electric vehicle or battery or fuel cell electric vehicle.

"I can remember 35 years ago when solar energy was associated with, I don't know, bean sprouts and whatever else alternative people were doing in those days," Brown said at an event in San Francisco to promote electric vehicles. "Well, this is not alternative anymore."

Brown has made climate change a focus of his administration but has tangled frequently with environmentalists.

According to a legislative analysis, the Sierra Club objected to a provision of the Perea bill that would repeal the California Air Resources Board's authority to require oil refiners to assure the public availability of hydrogen fueling stations once a certain number of vehicles are on the road. Instead, the bill will require the California Energy Commission to spend as much as \$220 million over the next decade funding the development of hydrogen stations.

Among the vehicles Brown looked over Monday was a red Smart car.

The governor said, "This looks like a good gubernatorial limousine."

Air board has allies in diesel pollution crackdown: Truckers

Truckers want tougher enforcement and point to competitors who violate state rules to install filters or upgrade to cleaner engines

By Tony Barboza, staff writer

L.A. Times, Sunday, Sept. 15, 2013

As state air pollution officials step up inspections of diesel exhaust from big rigs, some of their best allies are truckers themselves.

They are pushing the Air Resources Board to enforce pollution rules more aggressively for trucks in advance of a Jan. 1 deadline.

Truckers are also the No.1 tipsters, placing anonymous calls and sending emails to finger competitors they say are gaining an unfair advantage by not upgrading their engines or installing expensive filters that capture harmful diesel particulates before they are released into the air.

Diesel exhaust is the worst remaining pollution source on roadways. It contains smog-forming nitrogen oxides and fine particles — soot — that lodge deep in the lungs and are linked to lung and heart disease, asthma and cancer. Diesel soot was classified as a toxic air contaminant by the state in 1998.

Air quality officials say it accounts for 85% of Southern California's cancer risk from air pollution.

The regulations being phased in over the next decade are the nation's toughest and target the nearly 1 million diesel trucks that operate in the state.

By Jan. 1, about 50,000 more heavy diesel trucks — including those of the smallest fleets, owner-operators and independent drivers that make up the bulk of the industry — will have to install diesel particulate filters or upgrade to newer, cleaner engines.

The industry says the rules are not being enforced strongly enough.

"Companies have invested millions of dollars only to be undercut by carriers that are choosing not to comply because they figure they won't get caught," said Michael Shaw, a spokesman for the California Trucking Assn. "Without additional investment in enforcement ... there's little chance the Air Resources Board is going to do more than scratch the surface."

The agency sends about 20 enforcement staffers a day to conduct field inspections of trucks around the state. They target truck fleets and major transportation corridors, including the Los Angeles and Long Beach ports, the Central Valley and the U.S.-Mexico border. Fines range from few hundred to thousands of dollars.

"Resources are limited, and for a lot of this we expect the deterrent effect," said Paul Jacobs, chief of diesel enforcement for the Air Resources Board. "We'll have an enforcement presence, but we're not going to get everyone."

Most trucks pass the inspections. In the first six months of 2013, the agency conducted 3,098 inspections for the diesel truck rules and issued 378 citations, for a compliance rate of 88%.

That could dip once new requirements take effect.

"At the end of this year, there are going to be a lot of people clambering to try to get into compliance," said Matt Schrap, president of California Fleet Solutions, a company that helps trucking firms meet air quality regulations. "Some guys are probably just going to turn in the keys or keep operating until the ARB catches them."

California's rules, approved in 2008, faced stiff opposition from truckers and were relaxed two years later to give the industry more time to comply. But the rules put the state on track to slash emissions from diesel trucks 90% over the next decade and avoid 3,500 premature deaths, according to the Air Resources Board.

State officials estimate that trucking companies will pay \$2.2 billion to comply with the rules through 2023. The industry says it is spending much more, about \$1 billion a year, to replace trucks and install particulate filters, which can cost more than \$10,000 per truck.

Environmental groups laud air quality officials for boosting the number of inspectors in recent years and helping truckers access grants and loans to upgrade their rigs. As the rules kick in, they hope to see air quality improve and rates of respiratory illness ease in neighborhoods near heavy truck traffic.

"Millions of people are exposed in these hot-spot areas and need the relief," said Diane Bailey, senior scientist at the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Likely to see some of the sharpest drops in exposure to diesel pollution are truckers, she added. "They will gain the most in terms of public health protections."

That's perhaps one reason scrap truck driver Carlos Resendiz was not particularly upset when he was stopped at a roadside inspection at the Port of Los Angeles last month. Inspectors wrote out a ticket for a missing engine label, which carries a \$300 minimum fine for the company that owns the vehicle.

"The idea is not to pollute the air," Resendiz said in Spanish, "so I'm OK with it."

Study: Methane leaks from gas drilling not huge

By Kevin Begos and Seth Borenstein, The Associated Press
Sacramento Bee and Contra-Costa Times, September 16, 2013

WASHINGTON -- Drilling and fracking for natural gas don't seem to spew immense amounts of the greenhouse gas methane into the air, as has been feared, a new study says.

The findings bolster a big selling point for natural gas, that it's not as bad for global warming as coal. And they undercut a major environmental argument against fracking, a process that breaks apart deep rock to recover more gas. The study, mostly funded by energy interests, doesn't address other fracking concerns about potential air and water pollution.

The results, which generally agree with earlier Environmental Protection Agency estimates, were published Monday by the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

About 90 percent of the study funding came from nine energy companies that drill for natural gas with the rest coming from an environmental group. But study authors said they controlled how the research was done and how the wells were chosen for study. And even Robert Howarth of Cornell University, one of the scientists who first raised the methane leak alarm, calls the results "good news."

Howarth, who didn't participate in the new work, did caution that the results may represent a "best-case scenario." It might be, he said, that industry can produce gas with very low emissions, "but they very often do not do so. They do better when they know they are being carefully watched."

He and the study authors say more research is needed to explain why some studies have found high rates of leaking methane and others have not.

The University of Texas study wasn't a comprehensive study of all the places natural gas can leak. But Steve Hamburg, chief scientist at the market-oriented Environmental Defense Fund, which helped fund the study, noted that it presents "direct measures of things that everyone's been hand-waving about before. These are hard numbers using the best scientific approach that we can."

The study found that during the process of extracting natural gas from the ground, total leakage at the study sites was 0.42 percent of all produced gas. That is a bit less than what the EPA suggested is the national average. The U.S. produced 24.1 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in 2012, so that means about 101 billion cubic feet of methane leaked into the air during the first stage of production. Additional leaks occur in the second half of the process: delivery from wells to homes and power plants.

The study was one of the first time scientists were allowed to visit wells and use company data to measure escaping methane, said study lead author David Allen of the University of Texas.

Some experts who didn't participate in the work praised it for its direct measurements and access, but said the way it was designed had limits and they worried about making broad conclusions from it.

Although the study team looked at 489 wells across the country, that's about one-tenth of 1 percent of all the natural gas wells in the United States. "Even very high quality measurements cannot overcome the small number of operations or sites measured," said Gabrielle Petron, a top methane monitoring scientist for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. She said she worried about high-emitters, which are rare but can account for a whopping portion of emissions.

Ira Leifer, a University of California Santa Barbara scientist who has driven across country measuring methane leaks, said there's a problem in looking at "normal operations," as the new study did, versus "real operations," which includes big leaks that companies will steer scientists away from:

"Their study was not designed to look at the combination of normal and abnormal operations," Leifer said.

Over the last five years, advances in technology have led to a surge of gas drilling in states such as Pennsylvania, Colorado, Arkansas and North Dakota. Previously inaccessible deposits of shale oil and gas have been unlocked by fracking. Leakage of methane, the primary component of natural gas, has been an issue because the gas is 21 times more effective than carbon dioxide at trapping heat. But it generally lasts in the air about a decade, rather than hundreds of years as carbon dioxide does.

While methane concentrations in the atmosphere have been rising since 2007, federal scientists say they've found no sign that gas or oil drilling is contributing because the methane emissions come from a different part of the globe.

Some environmental groups that oppose fracking said the industry funding of the \$2.3 million study presented a conflict. But Ralph Cicerone, president of the National Academy of Sciences and an atmospheric scientist who has researched methane, disagreed. Cicerone said the authors represent "some of the very best experts around the country. It doesn't matter who is paying these people. They're going to give you the straight scoop."

Gov. Jerry Brown, corporate leaders tout electric vehicles

By Dana Hull

San Jose Mercury News, Monday, September 16, 2013

SAN FRANCISCO -- Gov. Jerry Brown joined forces with 40 leading corporations Monday to showcase the state's commitment to electric vehicles, as companies as diverse as Google and Coca-Cola promised to promote EVs with workplace incentives like free charging and car-sharing of plug-in vehicles.

The event, called "Drive the Dream," was held at the Exploratorium in San Francisco and organized by the California Plug-In Electric Vehicle Collaborative. Several plug-in hybrid and electric cars, from Tesla's Model S sedan to BMW's new i3, were on display outside the Exploratorium.

"I remember 35 years ago when solar energy was associated with bean sprouts," said Brown, who spoke while dozens of corporate executives stood behind him. "This is not alternative any more. BMW, Tesla, Honda, GM: This is impressive. Walgreens, Coke: This is mainstream America promoting electric vehicles."

Several corporations announced they are expanding charging stations. Walgreens plans to add 13 additional charging stations at locations throughout California. Coca-Cola, which owns Odwalla, is using electric trucks to deliver Odwalla juices in the state. Intuit announced plans to expand electric vehicle chargers at campuses in Mountain View, Menlo Park and elsewhere. Bank of America announced a \$3,000 incentive for its American employees to purchase a plug-in electric vehicle, in addition to a workplace charging program.

Google, which already has installed more than 700 charging stations at a dozen campuses, stressed its commitment to convert 5 percent of all existing and future parking spaces to electrical charging stations at the company's Mountain View headquarters. The company also has 56 plug-in vehicles from seven manufacturers as part of its "GFleet," a car-sharing program for Google employees.

"Plug-in vehicles are game-changers," said Rick Needham, Google's director of energy and sustainability. "Five hundred employees have their own EVs. At Google, we believe that plug-in vehicles are the future, and we are happy to support their adoption."

Brown said Monday that he would sign AB 8 and SB 359, a pair of bills that support electric vehicles. AB 8 provides more than \$2 billion in funding and extends current rebates for consumers who buy electric vehicles through 2023. The funding comes from vehicle license fees; consumers can get up to a \$2,500 rebate for purchasing an electric vehicle. SB 359 transfers another \$30 million to various state programs aimed at promoting low-emission vehicles.