

McCarthy requests exception on particulate standard

By Steven Mayer, staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Aug 30, 2014

House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Bakersfield, has requested a ruling on behalf of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District that would classify the current drought as an exceptional event when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency considers whether the valley has met the PM 2.5 standard.

According to a release from McCarthy's office, the valley should not be penalized when an exceptional event like the drought results in unusual spikes in airborne particulates.

Fine particulate matter, known as PM 2.5, originates from wood fires, mobile sources and some stationary sources. According to the air district, the valley was on track to demonstrate compliance with the 1997 PM 2.5 standard next year, but some exceedances late last year due to the drought -- not increased emissions -- derailed the region on its path toward attainment.

McCarthy is supporting the district's request to have EPA declare the current drought an exceptional event, which would remove these exceedances from attainment calculations, putting the valley air district back on track to meet the standard next year, the release said.

Failing to meet the standard could result in fines and other penalties to local communities.

Valley ozone at record low levels ... but

By Steven Mayer, staff writer

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The valley may be decades away from reaching the federal government's latest clean-air standards, a line that valley air officials refer to as the "moving goal posts" of federal regulation.

But for the second summer in a row, the region is seeing record-low levels of the corrosive gas known as ozone, the main component of valley smog.

"We are very pleased that the historically low ozone levels we saw last year were not just an anomaly," said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"This year, we are on track to do even better than last year in the one-hour and eight-hour standards."

Indeed, both measures have recorded significant progress this summer, but the difference in the two standards may be the difference between success and failure for the air district -- depending on one's definition.

"The one-hour standard is an old standard," said Dolores Weller, interim director of the Fresno-based Central Valley Air Quality Coalition, an environmental group that wants to see more limits set on industrial polluters, including dairy and oil.

The eight-hour standard was established years after the one-hour standard and reflects what scientists have since learned about ozone's long-term harmful health effects, Weller said.

It's the more valuable standard. And it's harder to attain.

To meet attainment in the one-hour standard, none of the more than two dozen ozone monitors up and down the valley may reach 125 parts per billion more than three times in a three-year period. Ozone, and ultimately smog, is created when its precursor chemicals are cooked by the hot summer sun.

August 2011 marked the first time in recorded history that the basin didn't exceed 125 parts per billion during a one-hour period in that historically smoggy month. In contrast, in summer 1998, district ozone monitors recorded 321 exceedances.

"By any objective measure, we have made great strides in cleaning up ozone in the valley," Sadredin said.

So far this summer, there have been no exceedances of the one-hour standard, the measure by which a \$29 million smog penalty charged annually to San Joaquin Valley motorists is assessed.

Last year, the air district asked the EPA to lift the multimillion-dollar penalty, most of which is paid through auto registration fees.

So far, the EPA has not responded, Sadredin said. But another summer with zero exceedances would make it very hard for the agency to say no to ending the annual penalty.

Meanwhile, smog season is not over, and it doesn't take much to cause a spike in ozone. So Sadredin asked that motorists use trip planning and other means to drive as little as possible on hot days.

Pollution experts also advise against idling in drive-thru lines or at the curb when parents pick up their children at school. Switching from gas to electric mowers is also helpful in cutting ozone.

The latest standard, which has a 2032 deadline for attainment, requires ozone levels of 75 ppb or lower over an eight-hour period. Even in a relatively good summer like this one -- and the cleanest August on record -- there have been approximately 60 exceedances so far.

Seventy-five parts per billion is virtually impossible to achieve with current technology, Sadredin said -- not without completely banning the use of fossil fuels in the valley.

But Weller says that's defeatist, and counter-productive.

We continue to approve pollution exemptions for various industries, she said, and so-called emission reduction credits allow local industries to pollute by buying emission credits from other industries.

There are plenty of areas, Weller said, where emission reductions can still be made.

"It's really dangerous to say we can't do anything about it," she said.

EPA staff recommends significantly lower ozone standard

By Neela Banerjee and Tony Barboza, Tribune Washington Bureau

In the Sacramento Bee, Friday, August 29, 2014

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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency staff said Friday that the nation should tighten smog rules significantly, a step that would improve air quality in California but force costly new requirements on government and industry.

The EPA staff recommendation is the final step before the rule goes to the agency's leadership and the White House. As a result of lawsuits by environmental and health groups, the agency must propose a new ozone rule by December and the final rule by October 2015.

Federal standards for ground-level ozone, the main ingredient in smog, have proven deeply contentious because they would compel many states, cities and industries to adopt new measures to cut air pollution at a cost of billions of dollars.

California would be particularly affected since much of the state does not meet the current, weaker standard for ozone that has been in place since 2008.

Ozone is a corrosive gas that forms when pollutants from vehicle tailpipes, power plants and factories bake in sunlight. The gas irritates lungs and airways and can cause asthma attacks, premature deaths, hospital and emergency room visits and millions of missed school and work days.

Pressure has been building for years from the scientific, health and environmental communities to reduce the federal standard for ground-level ozone to between 60 and 70 parts per billion. It is currently at 75 parts per billion, a standard set by the Bush administration that fell short of a recommendation for stricter limits from the EPA's advisory committee of independent scientists.

The EPA science advisory committee in June recommended strengthening the ozone standard to the 60-to-70-parts-per-billion range, which the agency's staff echoed in the findings issued Friday.

The committee said "ample scientific evidence" exists that ozone is harmful at lower levels than previously thought, citing studies showing it decreased lung function and increased respiratory symptoms and airway inflammation even at concentrations of 70 parts per billion.

The recommendations are part of a review the EPA is required to complete every five years under the Clean Air Act.

The Obama administration can choose to override the recommendations and adopt a weaker standard, including the current one. Facing enormous pressure from business in 2011, President Barack Obama scuttled the EPA's more stringent ozone rule, delaying it until after the 2012 presidential election.

But such a move today would likely trigger new litigation, said Paul Cort, a lawyer for Earthjustice, which sued the EPA to order it to issue the new standard.

California will face considerable challenges meeting a tougher ozone limit. The state has 16 areas that do not meet the current ozone standard, said Stanley Young, a spokesman for the state Air Resources Board. Lowering the standard would put even more areas out of compliance, many of them in rural areas, he said.

In California's South Coast basin, which has the nation's worst ozone pollution, a tougher federal standard would delay compliance with air quality standards further into the future. To meet the existing ozone standard of 75 parts per billion by a 2032 deadline, local air quality officials calculate they will have to slash by more than 75 percent smog-forming gases called nitrogen oxides.

"We're going to need to have zero or near-zero emissions across the entire economy, from transportation to businesses, to residences and personal products," said Sam Atwood, a spokesman for the South Coast Air Quality Management District, which includes Los Angeles and Orange counties.

The San Joaquin Valley also has some of the nation's worst ozone pollution and is many years away from meeting existing standards.

Anticipating the recommendation, industry representatives and Republican members of Congress have launched a campaign focusing on the monetary costs of a tighter standard, which they argue would be ruinous to the economy.

The National Association of Manufacturers wrote "that a more stringent ozone standard from the Obama administration could reduce GDP by \$270 billion per year ... increasing energy costs and placing millions of jobs at risk."

The EPA staff recommendations swiftly drew criticism from Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla. "With the economy already showing signs that it is losing ground under the administration's environmental regulations, now is no time to bow to the desires of the extreme environmental lobby here in Washington," Inhofe said.

Supporters of a tighter standard said industry has long argued that environmental limits would destroy the economy but such predictions have failed to materialize.

"We've heard that argument for 40 years," said Janice Nolen, assistant vice president of national policy at the American Lung Association. "We have evidence showing it's not true: Since the 1970s, we've reduced major air pollutants by 70 percent and the economy has more than doubled."

[Bakersfield Californian guest commentary, Saturday, Aug 30, 2014:](#)

Bicycle agenda? No, this is just about improving quality of life

By Jason Carter

Elections are right around the corner, and candidates are beginning to campaign, raise funding and walk neighborhoods in hopes of securing their positions this fall. Recently, one Bakersfield City Council candidate accused a sitting councilman of being too focused on the bicycle agenda. This candidate said it was important to represent "not just a single group that's focused on a single interest."

As the executive director of Bike Bakersfield, with an educational background in city and regional planning, I respectfully disagree with the above statement. We believe that bicycling for everyday

transportation is a simple, effective solution to addressing a number of issues which affect the quality of life in our community. And investing in safer streets for pedestrians and bicyclists benefits the community at large as well.

During the past few years, Bakersfield has made important strides to improve the family friendly bicycle infrastructure. The adoption of the Bicycle Master Plan, the passage of a Complete Streets Resolution and the addition of many miles of bike lanes reflect this success. These new lanes and investments are not just ways of creating a network that serves existing local recreational cyclists; they also encourage those who are interested -- but are concerned about biking -- to get out and use the bike as a transportation form. The additional infrastructure also serves all road users. When complete streets are built, road users' behavior is more clearly defined, resulting in safer streets for automobiles, bicyclists and pedestrians. When cities invest in building a comprehensive bicycle network, those who do not consider themselves avid cyclists feel comfortable riding on local streets, and all road users benefit from the increased safety.

When more people bike, the community as a whole benefits from this healthy form of transportation. Individuals who substitute a short three-mile trip on a bike five days a week can get the adequate amount of moderate exercise recommended by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention to maintain good health. Also, using the bike is a way to reduce household budgets by reducing transportation costs. AAA's Annual Cost of Car Ownership reported in 2013 that the average family spends about \$9,122 a year to own, operate and maintain a vehicle. More bikes on the roads means fewer cars on the road, which will help with our air quality and congestion problems.

Biking has proven to be an economic engine as well. The city of Portland, Oregon, began investing in biking in 1991, and in 2008 it accumulated 109 million miles of bike trips, which in turn saved city residents \$42 million dollars on healthcare costs and \$16 million dollars on fuel. This also is important in attracting young talent and preventing brain drain. As the millennial generation continues their national trend of driving less, it is important that our city prioritize biking investments. As active transportation modes (i.e. biking, walking, and public transportation) become more popular with the next generation of workers and consumers, Bakersfield must maintain a vision of how to attract and keep these citizens.

Continuing with this trend of building for the next generation, investments into biking and walking will greatly benefit our youth. Childhood obesity has doubled in the past 30 years, according to the CDC. As we invest into our roads, it is important that we understand the implications of designing roads that discourage our local youth from biking or walking to school. Investments in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure around our schools creates safe routes. And when parents feel safe letting their kids walk or bike to school, our youth get better access to healthy transportation that will have a positive impact on their health and academic success.

It is important that voters understand the broad impacts that different segments of our community have on each other. Some areas do benefit small groups while negatively impacting different parts of the community. However, when it comes to investing in bicycling for everyday transportation, we are diffidently not investing into a small portion of the population. Rather, we are improving the community's overall quality of life by making a healthy, affordable, clean and fun form of transportation more convenient for everyone.

Jason Cater is the executive director of Bike Bakersfield.