

Air Board Cracks Down on Lawn Mowers, Diesel Trucks

By Gary Polakovic, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

SACRAMENTO — The California Air Resources Board adopted new regulations Thursday to curb pollution from lawn mowers, chain saws and leaf blowers, setting the stage for a showdown with Congress over regulatory authority.

The Air Resources Board also adopted a regulation that would make California the first state to require retrofitting of garbage trucks to eliminate soot from diesel exhaust.

But it was the rule affecting lawn-care equipment that pits Sacramento against Washington, where a Senate committee recently approved a measure that would block the new rule.

Noting that some of these machines contribute as much to smog formation as automobiles, the Air Resources Board unanimously approved regulations that would slash emissions from lawn-care equipment by 35% over the next 17 years.

Such little machines might seem like bit players in the smog wars, but 14 million of them are in use in California, and their exhaust and leaky fuel tanks and hoses emit 152 tons of smog-forming fumes daily. It would take a 200-mile road trip in a 1997 model automobile to match the air pollution produced by a single lawnmower operating for two hours, according to the air board.

"This is an important rule. We need every pound of pollution control we can get from every category of pollution we can," said Alan C. Lloyd, chairman of the air board.

But the regulation could be overturned if Congress adopts a bill now pending in the U.S. Senate to strip the state of its authority to control not only lawn-care equipment, but other off-road engines, including irrigation pumps, forklifts and compressors.

A Midwest manufacturer of lawn mowers, Briggs and Stratton Corp., opposes the California regulation, which company officials say could force it to scale back production at two Midwestern factories, costing 22,000 jobs. The company, a campaign contributor to Sen. Christopher Bond (R-Mo.), persuaded the lawmaker to amend a federal spending bill to block the regulations California approved this week. The Senate could vote on the matter as early as next week.

Meanwhile, Democratic Sens. Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein of California are urging fellow senators to vote against Bond's amendment. Feinstein has also asked the Securities and Exchange Commission to investigate Briggs and Stratton for publicly charging that the regulation will wipe out jobs, although it reported in recent financial filings that the lawnmower measure would not affect the company or its financial performance.

Mindful of worsening air pollution in the Los Angeles region, Lloyd said the air board was compelled to act. Without deep cuts, emissions from off-road pollution sources, including lawn and garden equipment, are expected to increase by about 60% in California by 2020 and produce more smog-forming vapors than cars, trucks and buses.

"We are not going to be blackmailed. We are going to protect the rights of the state and the people of California. We're not going to cave in to the political pressure in Washington, D.C.," Lloyd said.

Under the regulations, makers of lawn and garden equipment are required to begin selling machines fitted with catalysts, leak-proof fuel tanks and fuel lines and improved carburetors in 2007. At the last minute, the air board amended the regulation to allow slightly more exhaust from the machines, which earned a key endorsement from Honda Motor Corp. Other affected companies include Ryobi Outdoor Power Products, Fuji Robin Industries Ltd. and Andres Stihl.

The new regulations are expected to add about \$45 to the price of a lawn mower, with much smaller increases for other machines. The air board estimates the regulations would cost industry about \$85 million annually. California consumers spend an estimated \$3 billion on lawn and garden equipment annually, making it the largest market for such products in the nation.

The adoption of the rule on garbage trucks will require 12,000 trash trucks statewide to begin replacing dirty, old engines or fitting trucks with anti-soot devices beginning in December 2004. They will have to complete the task by the end of the decade. The changes should result in a nearly 85% reduction in soot produced by those engines. That, in turn, will lead to less smog and haze.

The action marked the first time that state air quality officials had targeted heavy-duty diesel truck motors in use on highways and at construction sites. While regulations are in place to require manufacture of clean, new diesel engines and fuel, the measure the state Air Resources Board approved this week is the first in the nation to require fleets of existing diesel-powered trucks to begin employing advanced pollution controls.

"These vehicles are in everyone's neighborhood, resulting in direct, near-to-people exposures" of harmful diesel exhaust, said Catherine Witherspoon, the board's executive officer.

Diesel engines are a major source of haze-forming particles and emissions that cause ozone, the main ingredient in smog. But these engines have not been subject to as strict emission-lowering requirements as gasoline engines.

Without deep cuts in diesel exhaust, air quality officials say, it is unlikely smoggy regions like Los Angeles and the San Joaquin Valley will be able to meet air standards mandated by the Clean Air Act.

Kevin Mullins, controller of Mill Valley Refuse Service, said the rules would impose excessive costs on the small, waste-hauling business, which has 40 trucks and has operated in the Bay Area since 1906.

"This could potentially bankrupt our company," Mullins said. "This is a family's life savings that someone is risking on a technology that's not exactly proven."

Jed Mandel, president of the Engine Manufacturers Assn., called the regulation "seriously flawed" and urged the air board to replace it with a voluntary program. The association represents the nation's biggest diesel engine makers, including Caterpillar, Cummins, Detroit Diesel and International Corp.

But air quality officials and even some big waste companies said the rule was one of the most cost-effective measures the air board had recently considered. While the new measures will cost trash haulers about \$154 million over the next 20 years, ratepayers can expect to pay about \$1 more per year for refuse service over that time to offset the cost of low-polluting trash trucks, according to the air board.

"We support the rule. This is a very cost-effective measure," said S. Kent Stoddard, vice president of Waste Management Inc., which operates about one-third of the trash trucks in California. "This is a big leap of faith for all of us but this is a good rule."

Many of the technologies the air board is prescribing for trash trucks have been in limited use in trucks operating in Los Angeles County for three years. Frank Caponi, supervising engineer for the Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County, said about 360 trucks fitted with soot-catching filters performed well during tests. In other parts of the state, school and transit buses also have begun to reduce their emissions using similar technologies.

The air board estimates that the changes will eliminate 2.3 million pounds of soot in the air over the next 17 years. Air board officials say those reductions will save the lives of 80 people who otherwise would contract fatal forms of cancer.

A government study by the South Coast Air Quality Management District several years ago ascribed 70% of the cancer risk in air pollution to diesel exhaust. The state declared the pollutant a toxic air contaminant in 1998 and has been developing new measures to reduce the hazard. In coming months, the air board is scheduled to consider additional exhaust controls on diesel engines in fuel tankers, refrigeration trucks and public fleets of cars, trucks and vans.

California air board approves rule for less-polluting lawn mowers

Associated Press, published in the San Francisco Chronicle, September 26, 2003

California wants to cut smog by trimming pollution from lawn mowers.

The state air pollution control board has adopted new regulations to limit emissions from mowers and other small gas-powered equipment, as well as a regulation cutting soot from diesel exhaust in older garbage trucks.

Noting that mowers, weed trimmers and chain saws can contribute as much as cars to smog formation, the California Air Resources Board rule requires that by 2007 all small equipment sold in the state with gas- or diesel-powered engines come equipped with catalyysts, improved carburetors and leak-proof fuel tanks and lines.

The state estimates the changes adopted Thursday will add about \$45 to the price of a lawn mower, and will cost the industry about \$85 million a year. They should reduce pollution from affected small engines by one-third by 2020, according to the state, unless an effort to block the plan is approved in Congress.

Legislation recently passed by a U.S. Senate committee would prevent states from regulating lawn-care equipment and any other off-road engines, such as irrigation pumps and compressors.

The provision was attached as an amendment to a spending bill by U.S. Sen. Christopher Bond, R-Mo., who said the regulation would kill jobs in his state, home to two factories owned by Wisconsin-based engine manufacturer Briggs & Stratton Corp.

Bond's provision must be approved by the full Senate where its opponents include Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, both California Democrats.

Air board chairman Alan Lloyd said the board would stand in strong defense of its rule.

"We are not going to be blackmailed," he told the Los Angeles Times. "We are going to protect the rights of the state and the people of California. We're not going to cave in to the political pressure in Washington, D.C."

California seeks the new restrictions to aid its fight against some of the nation's worst smog. Feinstein has said the standards would cut emissions by 50 tons a day, the equivalent of removing 1.8 million cars from the state's roads.

Meanwhile, the air board's new rule on garbage trucks makes California the first state to mandate retrofitting to eliminate soot from diesel exhaust. It requires some 12,000 trucks statewide to replace engines or add anti-soot devices by 2010. The board estimates such changes will reduce pollution from the engines by as much as 85 percent.

Tracy BART extension under study

Kerana Todorov, Tracy Press, September 26, 2003

STOCKTON - Who will pay for a possible extension of BART over the Altamont Pass into Tracy and how the decisions will be made are among the many questions that have yet to be decided. On Thursday, Stacey Mortensen, executive director of the Altamont Commuter Express, said representatives from the Central Valley should have a say on how BART could be extended over the Altamont Pass.

The San Joaquin Council of Governments - the agency that studies transportation in the county and manages Measure K, the countywide transportation sales tax - should be involved in the process, Mortensen told the board.

People in the region are in a better position to find out how to best connect with BART, she said, adding that representatives need to make sure BART won't compete with ACE.

Mortensen spoke after a BART consultant presented four possible ways to extend BART from the tri-valley area to the Tracy area.

The presentation was for information only, and SJCOG took no action.

The BART board of directors could decide later this fall what to do next. If the project were to go forward, environmental studies would have to be done.

Estimated costs to extend BART between Walnut Creek and the Tracy area range from \$1.5 billion to \$1.2 billion, according to figures provided by Jeff Tumlin, a BART consultant with San Francisco-based Nelson\Nygaard. Annual operational costs are estimated between \$28 million and \$30 million, according to the consultant.

The four options discussed since this summer include the construction of a light-rail train to link Banta and downtown Tracy to downtown Livermore, Pleasanton and Walnut Creek via the Iron Horse Trail, a 12-mile long parkway. The train would follow Interstate 680. Another option would have the light-rail train connect Banta and Tracy to Livermore and Walnut Creek along I-680.

A third option includes the use of a heavier diesel-fueled train, which would run between Banta and Tracy and downtown Livermore, then travel along I-680 to Walnut Creek via the Iron Horse Trail. This train system could share the rail tracks with ACE.

The fourth - and cheapest - option would entail the extension of the BART system along Interstate 580. A bus service would then connect the BART stations in the tri-valley area to Tracy via a high-occupancy lane along the freeway.

A heavy diesel-fueled train, unlike a light-rail train, could be extended at a relatively low cost to other cities in the Central Valley, according to the consultant.

Gary Podesto, mayor of Stockton and a member of the board, and Lodi Vice Mayor Emily Howard agreed with Mortensen that BART needs to talk to Central Valley transportation representatives. "They need to talk to one another," Podesto said after the meeting.

Tracy Mayor Dan Bilbrey was not present at the meeting.

An estimated 95,200 people travel across the Altamont Pass, according to Nelson\Nygaard.

Tracy parents, teachers voice asbestos concerns

By Jessica M. Scully

Record Staff Writer

Published September 26, 2003

TRACY -- Teachers and parents at Central Elementary School are concerned after recent revelations about asbestos, a cancer-causing mineral, at the school.

Several newer teachers at the school said they were never told that the school, built in 1938, had asbestos. Parents are concerned, because they weren't told about an instance over the summer when a small amount of asbestos was exposed in a classroom.

"It's not that I'm going to go around saying 'My child is going to die,' " said April Williams, who was waiting Thursday afternoon in her car outside the school to pick up her child. "But if you have a kid who gets sick out of the blue, it's good to know. Doctors ask you about things like that," she said.

Central is one of a number of schools in the district, including Clover and Monte Vista middle schools, McKinley School and Tracy High School, constructed in an era when asbestos was commonly used in buildings to strengthen them, provide heat insulation and fire resistance.

Asbestos has been used so widely that it can be detected in indoor and outdoor air, soil, drinking water, food and medicines. But it is really only dangerous if inhaled, when it can become lodged in a person's lungs and cause lung cancer, cancer of the lining of the chest and asbestosis, where the lungs become scarred with fibrous tissue.

The district has completed asbestos abatement work at Central and other schools to make sure the asbestos won't become loose or airborne.

But over the summer at Central, a TV set fell down from the wall in a classroom. The wall contained asbestos, and the loose bolts on the TV mounting meant it was possible that some asbestos could have become airborne.

Bob Corsaro, director of maintenance for Tracy Unified School District, said the room was immediately checked, and no airborne asbestos was found. He added that the district inspected all the other classrooms and found no problems.

The incident is unlikely to cause any health problems for teachers or children at the school. But the fact that asbestos exists at the school at all is still a concern for some teachers. Several newer teachers said the first time they learned that the building had asbestos was at a recent staff meeting when Corsaro came to talk about the summer incident.

Joseph Hernandez, a fifth-grade teacher, was one of those concerned. Now in his fourth year at the school, he said he does not recall ever having been told the school had asbestos.

"Something like asbestos, it seems like everyone should be made aware that it is in the building and the work environment," he said.

Hernandez said teachers were told at the meeting not to move any instructional materials above a certain level on the walls of their classrooms because of asbestos in that part of the walls. But he and many teachers have stapled instructional materials there, like the alphabet and inspirational sayings and poems. Hernandez said he wishes he'd known about the asbestos earlier.

"I've been here four years, and I've done quite a bit of stapling," he said.

But not all teachers are worried about the asbestos or the summer incident. Michele Compton, a special-education teacher who has been at the school for 24 years, said she was more worried about pollen and allergens outside the school.

"I'm more concerned about those things than I am about the air quality in here, even though I think it could be better," she said.

Corsaro said he would recommend that the district start a new process to mail all teachers a notification about asbestos before they went to work. He added that the district would also mail out a letter to parents letting them know whether or not their child's school had asbestos. But he said he didn't think Central parents had been or would be told about the summer incident.

"The incident did not warrant parent notification, because it was such an isolated and minor incident," he said.

This isn't the first time teachers have been concerned about their health and Central's old buildings. In February, the district cleaned toxic mold from several rooms at the school after a teacher complained.

In 1998, students were evacuated from four classrooms after asbestos was accidentally uncovered during renovations. The students were later returned to their classrooms after tests performed by the district found that the air was safe.

Alternative fuel vehicles roll into S.F.

S.F. gets a hydrogen boost

City adds two fuel cell cars to its fleet of eco-friendly vehicles

Chuck Squatriglia, San Francisco Chronicle Staff Writer, September 26, 2003:

Two boxy little Hondas fueled by hydrogen silently brought the future of transportation to San Francisco on Thursday, when city officials announced that the cars will join what is already one of the largest fleets of alternative-fuel vehicles in America.

San Francisco scored the cars in a deal with Honda of America that makes the city the second in the nation to hop on the hydrogen bandwagon -- and officials said it won't cost taxpayers a dime.

Although the two Honda FCX coupes raise to just 38 the number of hydrogen fuel-cell vehicles tooling around California, advocates of the technology hailed them as another key step in the development of cars that might one day free us from petroleum.

"This puts the cars in real people's hands," said Jason Marks, director of alternative fuels for the Union of Concerned Scientists. "We are moving along the path to commercializing fuel cells. This

is but two vehicles. But they're two very important vehicles on the path to what could be millions of vehicles in the coming decades."

The announcement preceded the arrival at Crissy Field of 108 alternative fuel vehicles that spent Wednesday racing around Infineon Speedway at the Michelin Bibendum Challenge, the world's premier green-car competition.

It also came just four days after gubernatorial candidate Arnold Schwarzenegger embraced hydrogen as a way to cut pollution in half by 2011 and vowed to bring scores of hydrogen fueling stations to the state if elected.

Although critics have assailed his proposal as impractical, it underscores the mounting support for a fuel that emits only water and heat. And while most agree fuel cell cars remain 10 to 20 years from commercial viability, they are increasingly moving from the laboratory to the road.

San Francisco joins Los Angeles in adding fuel cell cars to the stable of vehicles employees use for city business. San Francisco was an early pioneer in alternative fuels such as electricity and natural gas, and adding hydrogen seemed logical, said Jaren Blumenfeld, director of the Department of the Environment.

"We believe hydrogen fuel cells are not the answer for tomorrow, but the answer for the future," he said.

The city will lease the cars for two years under a deal that is still being finalized but Honda said would cost the city \$24,000. Honda will provide the hydrogen, and Blumenfeld said grants will pay for the cars, which will hit the road in the next month or so.

Los Angeles currently has three Honda fuel cell cars and will add two more in the coming month. Honda was happy to send a couple north because it provides a chance to further test the vehicles.

"They're accumulating real-world miles," said Stephen Ellis, the company's manager of alternative fuel sales and marketing. "(The city) is using them like the average user would."

For all its high-tech gadgetry, the Honda FCX is perhaps most remarkable for how, well, unremarkable it is. Aside from using hydrogen to create electricity that drives a nearly silent motor producing the equivalent of 80 horsepower, the car feels and drives a lot like an ordinary Civic.

"That's what we wanted," Ellis said. "We didn't want it to look like a science project."

Still, the car remains at least a decade from mass production because the technology is outrageously expensive -- buying an FCX today would run you about \$2 million, Ellis said -- and there are only half a dozen hydrogen fueling stations in California.

One of the biggest criticisms of fuel cell technology is the fact it merely shifts fossil fuels from the car to hydrogen production and, in the end, doesn't reduce pollution or reliance on oil.

San Francisco plans to get around that problem eventually by using electricity produced by solar or wind power to extract hydrogen from water, thereby creating a truly sustainable form of transportation.

[Modesto Bee Opinions, September 26, 2003:](#)

Diesel pump fee is bogus

What good does the diesel pump fee do? The farmers are not going to stop using or even reduce the use of their pumps if they have to pay a 24-hour, 365-day operation fee as they have to have the water to produce a crop. As usual, the fee will go elsewhere and the cost will be passed on to the consumer (that's you and me, by the way).

The pump you showed in the picture (Local News, Sept. 17) is an electric pump and not a diesel; they produce no emissions.

JOHN STEWART
Modesto

[Letters to the Editor, Fresno Bee:](#)

Bring on biodiesel

By Tom C. Marsella, Fresno

(Published Friday, September 26, 2003, 5:18 AM)

I recently met with the Berkeley public works heads and learned they are now using biodiesel shipped in from the Coachella Valley for 100% of their diesel engines, with its increased cost paid for by slightly raising their garbage rates.

Biodiesel is refined from farm-grown vegetables and grease trappings. The first diesel engine was run on peanut oil.

Fresno and nearby farm communities do not currently use biodiesel. European municipalities subsidize their biodiesel by keeping the price about 10 cents lower than gasoline prices. Legislators in California could offer tax credits to farmers and local citizens for converting to the, cleaner-burning, higher-performance biodiesel to improve our Valley's air pollution immediately. If ignorance is bliss, many Fresno County clean air boards and legislators -- other than state Sen. Dean Florez -- should be smiling.