

Dairy air deadline postponed

By Mark Grossi

[Fresno Bee, Thursday, April 14, 2005](#)

The deadline for a key report on dairy air pollution has been pushed back to May 6, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District announced Wednesday.

Under a lawsuit settlement, the Dairy Permitting Advisory Group had until Friday to come up with a suggested revision for estimating dairy air pollution, which researchers now say the state has overstated.

But after a marathon discussion on the latest research Monday, many observers believed the advisory group could not meet the deadline.

Both sides in the lawsuit - the dairy industry and the air district - agreed to put off the report. The industry sued the district last year as air officials prepared to enforce operating permits on dairies.

As a settlement, the two sides had agreed to form the dairy advisory group, which includes representatives from dairy, the district, health, academics, environmentalists and community activists. The group will submit a report and recommendations to the air district, which will decide how much pollution to blame on cows. The pollution estimates will determine how many dairies must apply for federal permits as major sources of air pollution.

Under current emission estimates, livestock are among the top sources of a smog-making gas called volatile organic compounds. However, the estimates are based on a 1938 study that needs to be updated.

House Set to Pass Cheaper Energy Bill

By H. JOSEF HEBERT, Associated Press Writer

[S.F. Chronicle, Thursday, April 14, 2005](#)

WASHINGTON, (AP) -- Rebuffing Democrats on automobile fuel economy and Alaska oil drilling, House Republicans are setting the stage to pass their vision of a national energy agenda.

The energy bill, crafted Wednesday during daylong hearings by three committees, mirrors one the House passed nearly two years ago, only to have it die in the Senate. A vote by the full House is likely next week.

This time, though, the legislation is considerably cheaper.

Tax writers approved a tax package costing \$8 billion over 10 years, about a third of the \$23.5 billion price tag in the legislation two years ago.

The bill is still tilted heavily toward helping traditional energy industries including coal, oil and natural gas companies with little to encourage energy efficiency. Less than \$500 million in tax incentives are directed at renewable energy and efficiency programs. It does not address improvements in automobile fuel economy.

The legislation would boost production of corn-based ethanol, a boon to farmers, by requiring refiners to use at least 5 billion gallons a year as a gasoline additive. Proponents maintain it will reduce the need for oil imports.

Currently the industry produces about 3.7 billion gallons annually.

The bill also contains two controversial provisions that - if pursued in the Senate - would likely prompt a filibuster: a green light to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska, and a shield for makers of the gasoline additive MTBE against product liability lawsuits.

The MTBE issue scuttled an energy bill in 2003.

Rep. Lois Capps, D-Calif., argued that MTBE makers knew the additive, used to reduce air pollution, would contaminate drinking water and should not be absolved from cleanup costs. Her attempt to remove liability waiver from the bill failed 31-20 in the Energy and Commerce Committee.

Republicans also turned back Capps' attempt to scuttle a provision that would give MTBE makers \$1.75 billion for transition costs as MTBE is phased out after 2014. Capps says cleanup costs could be as high as \$29 billion, although that figure is disputed by the industry.

Rep. Joe Barton of Texas, the committee's chairman, defended the MTBE waiver, arguing that the additive became widely used only because Congress in 1990 required an oxygenate in gasoline. MTBE and ethanol were the only readily available choices, he said.

The Energy and Commerce Committee cleared its energy provisions by a 39-15 vote late Wednesday.

In the House Resources Committee, Republicans by a 30-13 vote turned back an attempt by Democrats to strip out the provision that would, for the first time, allow oil exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska.

"This is about making the country safer," countered Rep. Don Young, R-Alaska, because it will increase domestic production and ease reliance on imports.

The government estimates about 10.4 billion barrels of oil beneath the refuge's coastal plain. Environmentalists complain oil drilling will harm caribou, migratory birds and other wildlife.

The ANWR drilling issue is all but certain to be left out of the Senate's energy bill because it will attract a Democratic-led filibuster and could jeopardize the legislation. Refuge drilling proponents in the Senate, instead, are hoping to get the measure passed as part of the budget process where the filibuster cannot be used.

Democrats also criticized the House bill for failing to deal with gas-guzzling automobiles.

A proposal, offered by Rep. Ed Markey, D-Mass., that would require the Transportation Department to boost fleet-wide auto fuel economy requirements beginning with 2015 model year cars, was defeated.

Markey said cars are less fuel efficient today than they were eight years ago. "We are now moving backwards," he said.

The House bill also would:

- Provide more favorable tax treatment for expanding or modernizing the electricity grid, and for building more natural gas pipelines.
- Establish mandatory electricity grid reliability rules.
- Give a 20 percent tax credit up to \$2,000 to homeowners who put in more energy efficient windows, doors and insulation.
- Require the Energy Department to stop oil from being added to the Strategic Petroleum Reserve if oil prices dip below \$40 a barrel.
- Give the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission clear final authority to approve liquefied natural gas import terminals, even over state or local objections.
- Allow the Environmental Protection Agency to extend compliance deadlines for cities to meet federal smog standards if they show most of the pollution comes from outside the region.

Villagers riot over China factories' pollution

Jim Yardley, New York Times

[S.F. Chronicle, Thursday, April 14, 2005](#)

Beijing -- Thousands of people rioted Sunday in a village in southeastern China, overturning police cars and driving away officers who had tried to stop elderly villagers from protesting against pollution from nearby factories.

By Wednesday afternoon, witnesses say, crowds gathered in the village, Huaxi, in Zhejiang province to gawk at a stunning tableau of destroyed police cars and shattered windows. Police officers were reported to be barring reporters from the scene, but local people reached by telephone said villagers controlled the riot area.

"The villagers will not give up if there is no concrete action to move the factories away," said Lu, a villager who said he had witnessed part of the confrontation. "The crowd is growing. There are at least 50,000 or 60,000 people." He would not give his full name.

Other villagers gave substantially smaller crowd estimates. But they agreed on the broad outlines of a violent clash that villagers say came after they had tried in vain for two years to curb pollution from chemical plants in a nearby industrial park.

An account in a local state-controlled newspaper blamed local agitators for the brawl and said thousands of people had set upon government workers with rocks, clubs and sticks.

There were conflicting reports about injuries, and Lu said two elderly women among the protesters had been gravely injured after being run over by a police vehicle. The story in the Dongyang Daily said more than 30 government employees had been hospitalized, including five with serious injuries. Neither account could be confirmed.

Several thousand people in Beijing and Guangzhou held protests against Japan last weekend as well. By contrast, those protests were officially authorized, as youthful urbanites shouted angry slogans and at one point tossed bottles at the Japanese Embassy at a time of heightened diplomatic tensions between the two countries.

But the riot described in Huaxi is more a symptom of the widening social unrest in the Chinese countryside that has become a serious concern for top leaders. Last year, tens of thousands of protesters in western Sichuan province clashed with police over a dam project. Smaller rural protests are commonplace and often violent.

Huaxi is a few hours' drive south of Hangzhou, the provincial capital of coastal Zhejiang. It is a short distance from the Zhuxi Industrial Function Zone, the local industrial park that villagers say is home to 13 chemical factories.

"The air stinks from the factories," said a villager, Wang Yuehe. She said the local river was filled with pollutants that had contaminated local farmland.

"We can't grow our crops," Wang said. "The factories had promised to do a good environmental job, but they have done almost nothing."

Wang said villagers had pooled their money for two years and sent representatives to file complaints at government petition offices in Zhejiang province and in Beijing. "But there have been no results so far," she said.

On March 24, a group of elderly people, mostly women, set up bamboo tents and other roadblocks on the road leading to the factories. On April 2, the government temporarily shut down the factories. But by Sunday local officials had dispatched police officers and workers to break up the protest. Villagers said as many as 3,000 officers had arrived in scores of cars and buses.

The fight apparently erupted after officers already had taken down the makeshift tent city on the road. Villagers said thousands of angry people had hurried to the scene after the police attacked some of the elderly protesters. The mob then surrounded workers and officers, said witnesses and the newspaper account.

Several villagers said local officials owned shares in various local factories. But according to the official newspaper, local officials "paid great attention" to the environmental problems and had paid compensation for past discharges of pollutants into the river.

The story also said that officials had decided to break up the protests Sunday because they were worried that "the coming of cold air and dramatic temperature drops threatened the health of feeble old women."

[Fresno Bee, Editorial, Thursday, April 14, 2005:](#)

'No protections'

The day before The Bee chastised critics of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's solar home proposal for calling it the "greening of a dirty and costly energy plan" [editorial April 8], it was reported that the governor is working to hook California transmission lines up to new power plants burning 25 million tons

of coal each year throughout the western United States. So maybe he's just browning a clean energy plan.

The governor's plan would make California even more dependent on out-of-state energy suppliers with no protections to stop these companies from Enron-like price gouging.

The governor has also supported changes that would allow big industry to get special access to the cheapest power at the expense of regular consumers.

You can call it what you want, but don't ignore what it is.

Jerry Flanagan

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