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EDITORIALS

Destructive construction

Diesel exhaust from heavy machinery is a lethal source of pollution. It's time to clean it up.

IF YOU'RE ANYWHERE NEAR a construction site, try not to breathe. The 112,000 tractors, excavators, backhoes and other construction machines in California are the state's second-largest source of diesel pollution, killing an estimated 1,100 people a year and sickening many thousands more.

It's a big problem, and requires an ambitious solution. In fact, a proposal from the state Air Resources Board to force contractors to retrofit or replace old, dirty diesel engines would dwarf every other air toxics control measure state regulators have produced, as would its price tag — the board puts it at \$3 billion, while construction industry officials say it's at least three times that amount. After years of effort to draft it, a vote on the regulation in May was tabled amid heavy resistance, not only from the construction industry but from municipal governments, fire departments and even the California Department of Transportation, which fears it would boost the costs of new roads and other public infrastructure.

Meanwhile, the air board has been thrown into disarray, in part because of the construction equipment measure. Chairman Robert F. Sawyer was fired by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger last week, and Executive Director Catherine Wither-

poon resigned Monday; both say their efforts to crack down harder on polluters were undermined by the governor's office.

The board's new rules would undoubtedly increase the already soaring cost of construction. They also would decrease the number of bidders on large infrastructure projects and could hurt some smaller contractors. But the air board says most companies would pass the costs on to customers, which should minimize business failures, while the overall cost of construction in California should rise by just 0.3%. And the building industry is hardly suffering: Commercial and industrial construction in California has been skyrocketing since 2004, and state voters have approved \$20 billion in infrastructure bonds that will fatten contractors' wallets — and kill untold numbers of people absent a crackdown on dirty equipment.

Environmentalists have roasted the air board for being too slow to meet federal air-quality standards or cut greenhouse gases, but the problem appears to be higher up. Schwarzenegger's green veneer tends to crack any time an environmental initiative encounters strong resistance from the business lobby. It's possible to be both pro-business and pro-environment, but when those values conflict, one has to make painful choices — choices that the governor all too often tries to duck. Cleaning up is expensive, and polluters are going to have to foot the bill. If Schwarzenegger is serious about fighting pollution, he should publicly back the construction-equipment rules.



The Web Site of The Sacramento Bee

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Editorial: Deadly diesel soot

Don't weaken construction equipment rules

Published 12:00 am PDT Thursday, May 24, 2007

To protect kids and the public from potentially deadly diesel soot, California has retrofitted or replaced more than 4,000 school buses in recent years. This effort has cost the state and school districts tens of millions of dollars. Voters last year approved \$200 million in bonds to help further this clean-up crusade.

Now the state is turning its attention to one of the largest sources of diesel pollution -- "off-road" equipment, such as bulldozers and backhoes. On Friday, the California Air Resources Board will begin deliberations on rules to control diesel pollution from this equipment. Board members need to resist pressure from the construction industry to weaken these proposed rules.

Diesel soot is an especially toxic type of particulate pollution. When inhaled, these particles lodge deep in the lungs. Scientists have linked this pollution to asthma, heart attacks and premature deaths. Construction equipment accounts for 20 percent of the diesel particulates emitted in California, largely because contractors generally use old and durable machines built with few or no pollution controls.

Under the air board's proposed regulations, contractors and public utilities would have several options in reducing particulate pollution 85 percent in 13 years.

In the near term, they could purchase cleaner used equipment. They could install filters or replace the engines in their current machines. Alternately, they could save up and purchase the cleanest possible models -- known as Tier IV equipment -- that will be available in a few years.

No doubt, this transition will be expensive. More than 180,000 pieces of equipment will be affected, from forklifts to huge earth-moving machines. It will cost the industry about \$3 billion over 13 years, according to CARB's estimates. Yet the payoff will be worth it. The air board says the new standards could save about 4,000 lives by 2030 and more than \$18 billion in health costs.

The construction industry, which is about to get a multibillion-dollar infusion of funds from the infrastructure bonds, has known for seven years these regulations were coming. Instead of preparing and gearing up, the industry is now spending its money on a publicity campaign headed by two of Sacramento better-connected consulting firms. These spin doctors are trying to dupe lawmakers and the media into believing that the CARB regulations will slow down upgrades of highways, schools and levees that voters approved last year.

These scare tactics should not sway lawmakers or the air board. Reviews by CARB staff have found that, contrary to industry claims, there is readily available used equipment to meet the proposed deadlines, and manufacturers ready to produce new engines.

The regulation also includes "safety valves" that allow the industry to forgo purchases if cleaner equipment isn't available. If anything, these safety valves are too generous.

Indeed, air districts in Southern California and the San Joaquin Valley want the California air board to be

more aggressive and to seek more reductions of nitrogen oxides from construction equipment. Without those cuts, the air districts fear they may miss federal deadlines for reducing ozone smog. Missing the deadlines could also result in a suspension of federal transportation dollars. (Hear that, construction firms?)

Possibly because of industry pressure, the air board isn't deciding on the off-road diesel regulations this week but will wait until its July meeting to vote. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who campaigned for governor on an ambitious promise to reduce the state's air pollution by 50 percent, needs to tell his air board appointees to avoid further delays, and vote for clean air.

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EDITORIALS

Air rule targets pollution spewers

Monday, May 21 2007

Cleaning up California's polluted air isn't a job for people weak in heart or short on political will. The resolve of the California Air Resources Board will be tested this week when members consider a controversial, but much needed rule to reduce pollution spewing from diesel-burning construction equipment.

The rule has been in the making for years. But opposition from the construction industry and other delays have stalled the requirement that particulate matter, or PM, and nitrous oxide, a trigger ingredient of smog, emitted from bulldozers, graders and other off-highway equipment be reduced in phases over the next several years.

The industry contends meeting the requirement and deadlines will be expensive and difficult because cleanup technology presently does not exist. Industry representatives warn that major public works projects, including those funded by the voter-approved mega-bonds on last November's ballot, could be delayed if construction firms have to idle polluting, outdated equipment.

The proposed rule gives the industry years to phase in the use of cleaner equipment. Cleanup technology is being developed and is expected to be in place fairly soon. But industry representatives, who have stalled the rule for years, want more time. They also want financial help to convert equipment to be cleaner burning.

While the fight over this new rule has been intense, it has been in the background for years. Only as the rule faces board consideration this week are average Californians those who breathe the state's polluted air and are being sickened by it learning about the fight.

The proposed rule would take effect in 2010 and be implemented in phases. Large companies and government agencies would have to replace or retrofit their off-road equipment by 2020. Smaller companies would have until 2025.

Next to implementing the greenhouse gas law, CARB's adoption of the proposed diesel rule is considered to be one of most significant cleanup steps the state board will take this year. It is being closely watched for its ripple effect on regulators throughout the nation.

Off-road diesel equipment use contributes an estimated 20 percent of California's overall air pollution 1 percent PM and 9 percent NOx. The proposed rule is expected to cut PM emissions by 75 percent and NOx by about 30 percent.

Industry representatives argue the cost of achieving these small reductions is too high. The state's Air Resources Board staff estimates implementing the rule will cost \$3 billion, while industry representatives say it will be more like \$9 billion. Some inflate the figure to \$14 billion.

The rule is just one more step in a tough, long march to clean up California's polluted air. The oil industry, agriculture, manufacturing and average Californians have had to pay cleanup costs. Now it is time for the construction industry.

<http://www.bakersfield.com/opinion/editorials/story/146927.html>



Editorials

Diesel danger

11:24 PM PST on Friday, December 8, 2006

California ignores the hazards of pollution from construction equipment at residents' peril. The state has clamped down on diesel pollution from big rigs and buses; it is time to add bulldozers, backhoes, excavators and other off-road machinery to the regulatory list.

The Union of Concerned Scientists released a report Tuesday that puts the health effects of diesel-powered construction equipment into stark terms (see www.ucsusa.org/clean_vehicles/california_driving/digging-up-trouble.html). The document shows why the state Air Resources Board's plans to limit such pollution deserve public support.

The study estimates that diesel exhaust from construction equipment costs California \$9.1 billion a year in health-care expenses. The pollution causes more than 1,100 premature deaths annually -- more than 700 in Southern California alone. Not surprisingly, cities from the fast-growing Inland counties rank high on the list of places at risk.

Inland counties suffer from some of the worst diesel pollution in the nation. One-fourth to one-third of all particle pollution from vehicles in the Inland region comes from off-road heavy equipment, Air Resources Board data show. Numerous studies link these microscopic bits of diesel soot to heart and lung ailments, even premature death.

So Inland residents, especially, should support the state air board's plans to limit pollution from construction equipment.

The air board's proposed rules call for cutting current levels of particle pollution from construction equipment by 85 percent by 2020. The plan sets emissions targets that companies can meet by replacing old engines with cleaner new ones and fitting existing engines with devices that cut pollution. The rules also restrict unnecessary vehicle idling. The air board will hold hearings across the state on the rules this month and hopes to have the regulations in place next year.

No doubt the regulations would add to construction costs, always a sensitive issue. But the state cannot stand idly by while Californians' health is at risk.

The building industry provides a huge economic boost to the state, but that fact does not make the pollution belching from construction equipment any less dangerous.

A diesel dilemma

Tuesday, May 22, 2007

DIESEL engines are durable, thrifty and hard working. But the power plants are also poster kids for pollution, spewing soot and smog-causing chemicals. These workhorse engines are also lightly regulated compared to cars.

California's state smog board, at long last, is proposing rules to chip away at dirty air from diesels. On Friday, the panel will hold a hearing on requiring emission controls on construction equipment, including behemoth road-graders down to forklifts, airport baggage trucks and ski resort snowcats.

The rules will impose financial pain, but, on balance, they will benefit the state with cleaner air and fewer incidents of death and disease linked to cancer-causing soot. The rules should help precisely where it's needed most: in the construction-heavy Central Valley and inland Southern California where the air is already among the dirtiest in the nation.

The state Air Resources Board should withstand a determined push from the construction industry, which is fighting the rules. While acknowledging the problem, this business sector wants a too-long period to phase in the clean air rules. The state proposes to require cleaner diesels beginning in 2010, while the industry is asked for several years more, depending on the age of the machinery. The rules affect some 180,000 vehicles.

The off-road equipment accounts for about a quarter of diesel-caused particulates, the specks of grit spewed from the smoky diesel tailpipes. The state aims to remove 85 percent of the amount, in a series of steps running from 2010 to 2025, and up to 70 percent of oxides of nitrogen (NOX), a smog-causing chemical. During this phase-in, the board estimates the changes will save 4,000 lives.

Cost is a factor. The state smog board estimates the bill at \$3 billion. Industry critics say it will be \$13 billion because new engines may be needed. The results will add to building costs and lead to job losses as small businesses struggle to upgrade old equipment, opponents say. The state could offer financial incentives to ease the changeover.

But the goal of cleaner air can't be denied. Since 2000, the state has steadily moved on diesel engines, pushing changes on buses, fuels and rules on idling engines. Next year, the smog panel will take on the biggest target, diesel trucks. This is no time to waver from the important goal of clean air and public health.