

Study: Calif. should drop bid to eliminate tailpipe emissions

By ANDREW BRIDGES AP Science Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) - California should drop its bid to force the auto industry to start selling vehicles that spew no pollutants and instead tighten tailpipe emissions for all new cars and light trucks to clean up the state's air, a study issued Wednesday recommends.

The state Air Resources Board's controversial zero-emissions vehicle mandate is too costly a means of meeting federal air quality standards, said economist Lloyd Dixon, author of the report by the nonprofit Rand Corp.

The 12-year-old mandate requires an increasing percentage of vehicles sold in California to produce no tailpipe emissions, a mark met only by those powered by batteries. The law was to have entered effect Jan. 1, but is on hold and will be reviewed by the agency next year.

The Air Resources Board will tinker with the mandate but not drop it, a spokesman predicted.

"The idea the ZEV program should be dropped, I don't see that happening," spokesman Richard Varenchik said. "I see tuneups and changes, but not dropping it."

The move toward a vehicle fleet that produces no tailpipe emissions would provide only a marginal improvement in air quality - at an enormous cost - over cranking down emissions to negligible levels, Dixon said.

"The technology developed in controlling emissions from gasoline vehicles is far better than anyone would have thought in 1990, when the ZEV mandate was created, so the incremental levels you get from going from these very little levels to nothing is not much," Dixon said.

In the last decade, gasoline-powered, internal combustion engines have grown far cleaner. A recent University of California, Riverside, study found clean-burning engines running on specially formulated gasoline produce extremely low levels of pollutants.

Auto makers, including Honda and Nissan, already offer for sale in California several models that qualify as "super ultra-low emissions vehicles," which are 90 percent cleaner than the average new car.

Further improving the longevity of the so-called "sulev" cars would reduce emissions of smog-forming oxides of nitrogen and hydrocarbons at a cost of between \$18,000 and \$71,000 a ton, Dixon estimated. Shrinking those already small amounts of emissions to zero, by moving to battery-powered vehicles, would cost a whopping \$260,000 to \$710,000 a ton.

"It just doesn't make sense to crank motor vehicle emissions all the way to zero," Dixon said.

The study ignores one of the main thrusts of the ZEV rule, said Daniel Becker, director of the Sierra Club's global warming and energy program.

"In addition to cutting pollution directly, the other main purpose of the ZEV requirement is to force auto makers to explore and develop alternatives to the internal combustion engine, which has gotten us into so much trouble in the last 100 years," Becker said.

That push could backfire, Dixon said.

"The problem with requiring or pushing particular sets of technology is you could end up going down the wrong path," said Dixon, adding that battery-powered vehicles have largely been a commercial failure.

Agency seeks phase-out of most common dry cleaning solvent

By ANDREW BRIDGES AP Science Writer

DIAMOND BAR, Calif. (AP) - Saying it poses a serious health risk, regulators want to phase out the most commonly used dry cleaning solvent in the greater Los Angeles region.

If adopted by the South Coast Air Quality Management District board, the move to ban perchloroethylene, or perc, is expected to be copied elsewhere in the nation. While cities such as New York and San Francisco heavily regulate perc's use, nowhere has it been banned outright, according to the management district.

The move faces widespread industry opposition and threats of legal action; dry cleaners say it is a must for clean clothes. But the agency says it dirties the air, water and soil, and is a likely carcinogen.

The agency wants the 2,200 dry cleaners in the greater Los Angeles area to switch to perc alternatives by 2019. Its 12-member board is expected to vote on the issue no earlier than Nov. 1.

The cancer risk posed by long-term exposure to perc is between 20 and 140 in 1 million, scientists estimate. Among the toxic substances present in the region's air, perc poses the second largest cancer risk, after diesel exhaust, according to a 2000 AQMD study.

"To the average person on the street, they have a belief a refinery or power plant is their largest exposure to carcinogenic air contaminants, when in reality, it's a dry cleaner in their community - other than diesel exhaust," said Barry Wallerstein, executive director of the clean-air agency.

Machines that use perc alternatives can cost more, are more labor intensive and don't clean as well, said Paul Choe, vice president of the Korean-American Dry Cleaners Association of Southern California. At least half of the dry cleaners in Southern California are owned by Korean-Americans.

"If we had a lot of money, we'd go non-perc, hire more people and use more labor. But most people can't do that," said Choe, owner of a Lancaster dry cleaner.

The AQMD expects the perc industry will sue if the rule passes.

The agency estimates a phase-out will cost the industry \$4.3 million a year, because machines that use alternatives, including hydrocarbon solvents, cost between \$29,000 and \$77,000.

The AQMD has regulated perc since 1980. Successive rules, including those requiring newer machines that leak less perc to the atmosphere, have cut emissions by about 80 percent. The agency has also reined in perc use in motion picture film cleaning and printing.

Since then, perc emissions have declined steeply, according to the Halogenated Solvents Industry Alliance, which represents the world's four largest manufacturers of perc, including The Dow Chemical Co.

Rather than ban perc outright, the group is proposing that AQMD give dry cleaners in its jurisdiction five years to switch over to newer, less-polluting perc machines. About two-thirds of dry cleaners in the region use older machines, the group estimates.

"That would preserve perc as an alternative, while still protecting public health," said Steve Risotto, the Washington, D.C. group's executive director.

The AQMD says even the newest technology isn't clean enough.

"The amount they still use is of concern to us," said Jill Whynot, the AQMD's planning and rules manager.

A typical dry cleaner uses between 80 and 100 gallons of perc a year; about half is lost to the atmosphere, the AQMD estimates.

Since dry cleaners evenly pepper the region, the rule should be of wide interest, said Tim Carmichael, executive director of the Los Angeles-based Coalition for Clean Air.

"They are virtually in every neighborhood in the region. That means this is not somebody else's problem," Carmichael said.

[Letter to the Editor, Fresno Bee, Sept. 19, 2002](#)

A vote for bad air

By Michael Becker
Fresno

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District reported an air quality index reading of 195 for Sept. 12 and projected that Sept. 13 air quality would hit the top of the chart, 200. The district advised us to avoid outdoor activities, since this level of air pollution is dangerous to everyone, not just children, the elderly and asthmatics.

If you like air pollution, vote for the Measure C extension. Eighty percent of the projected \$3 billion to be raised by Measure C over the next 30 years is slated for road, highway and freeway projects. I suppose if this 30-year freeway and suburban sprawl boondoggle passes we can just avoid breathing altogether.

Seriously, we can do better. Vote "no" on the Measure C extension.