

Truckers to fight air board

By Gerald Carroll

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Wednesday, Dec. 12, 2007

Area trucking companies - and businesses that rely heavily on truck fleets - say they are under assault from the California Air Resources Board.

The board is proposing that all large diesel-powered trucks reduce their emissions by 2010 - mostly through expensive replacement of catalytic converters, said Ron Faulkner of Tulare-based Faulkner Trucking.

"It's going to cost \$30,000 per truck to change out the [catalytic] converters on trucks made before 1998," Faulkner said.

"That will put all 27 of my trucks out of business. We can't afford that."

Faulkner and his trucking colleagues are planning a Saturday meeting, starting at 1 p.m. at EMT Tire, 15243 Road 153, Porterville, to discuss the matter.

Faulkner said he hopes that state Sen. Roy Ashburn and Assemblyman Bill Maze will attend.

In a separate action, the board Tuesday announced that Visalia-based Todd Plumbing Inc., which runs an 85-truck fleet, was fined \$5,625 for "failing to properly inspect its heavy-duty diesel trucks for compliance with the state's smoke-emissions standards," said board chairwoman Mary Nichols.

"Strange that none of our trucks has ever failed an emissions test," Jim Todd said. "But one day these people from the state walked in, threatened us and wanted to fine us \$12,000 to \$15,000 for failing to get smoke tests done on our trucks."

The board never explained what the difference was between a "smoke test" and a "smog test," Todd said. However, his firm's attorneys negotiated the settlement anyway.

"It was like the Gestapo," Todd said. "They never gave us any notice or explanation, but the whole program [state board] is fine-driven."

"That's how they make their money - blaming truckers for all the pollution."

Todd's truck fleet is primarily made up of 1-ton plumbers' pickups, not the big semis Faulkner's company uses.

Still, the state is putting all truckers on a similar standard, regardless of their size, whether they even run diesel, or what size they are, truckers say.

Board spokeswoman Patricia Rey said such complaints from the trucking industry are common.

"The Faulkner group has to realize that all truckers from all parts of the state need to reduce emissions," Rey said.

Nichols was even tougher on Todd Plumbing.

"Violations such as these exacerbate already fouled air in a part of the state [the Central Valley] that needs all the help it can get," Nichols said. "Our enforcement efforts are crucial to obtain those emission reductions so needed for Valley residents."

Mineta, Slater urge consistent fuel economy rules

By Ken Thomas, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Tuesday, December 11, 2007

WASHINGTON, (AP) -- Two former U.S. transportation secretaries have warned that new fuel efficiency standards included in an energy bill could jeopardize the domestic auto industry if it creates conflicting requirements.

Rodney Slater and Norman Mineta, in a letter to Senate leaders, said the energy bill should clarify the authority of two federal agencies that regulate gas-mileage standards and tailpipe emissions.

"As the energy bill moves to the Senate, we urge you to include a provision that ensures the DOT and EPA work in concert to give automakers one fuel economy target," Slater and Mineta wrote Majority Leader

Harry Reid, D-Nev., and Commerce Committee Chairman Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii, on Monday.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., rejected attempts by Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich., to include a provision in the energy bill that would ensure that any regulations by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Transportation Department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration be consistent and not create conflicts that would be difficult for the auto industry to meet.

The White House has issued a veto threat for the energy bill, warning that it would raise taxes and increase energy prices. The administration also has raised concerns about the potential inconsistent fuel economy rules.

The Supreme Court ruled earlier this year that the EPA had the power to regulate tailpipe emissions from cars and trucks, a move which could come into conflict with NHTSA's role in setting fuel economy standards.

Environmentalists have said forcing the two agencies to produce consistent regulations would effectively prevent California from advancing its strict tailpipe emissions standards, which would require the auto industry to build vehicles that produce 30 percent less greenhouse gas by 2016. More than a dozen other states plan to adopt the rules.

To enforce the rules, California needs a waiver from the EPA exempting it from national greenhouse gas pollution standards set under the Clean Air Act. The EPA is expected to make a decision on the waiver before the end of the year and is developing new regulations in response to the Supreme Court ruling.

Frank O'Donnell, president of Clean Air Watch, said any attempt to undermine the Supreme Court decision "could end up being a fundamental attack on states' rights."

Slater, who served as DOT secretary during the Clinton administration, and Mineta, a former Democratic congressman from California who led the Transportation Department during the Bush administration, said conflicting standards could waste billions of dollars in research and engineering resources.

"Allowing the EPA to pursue its own separate, unharmonized rulemaking track could negate Congress' finely balanced legislation - not to mention jeopardize the auto industry," they wrote.

A Reid spokesman declined comment on the letter.

State sues U.S. over utility pole transformers

Bob Egelko, Chronicle Staff Writer

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Environmental groups and state Attorney General Jerry Brown have sued the Bush administration over the U.S. Energy Department's new efficiency standards for the 40 million electric transformers on utility poles around the nation, saying the rules are too weak and would allow pollution that contributes to global warming.

"These standards allow a huge waste of energy to continue," said Tim Ballo, a lawyer with the environmental law firm Earthjustice, which filed appeals Tuesday on behalf of the Sierra Club in San Francisco and the Natural Resources Defense Council in New York.

Brown's office filed an appeal Friday with the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco, where the cases are likely to be consolidated.

A 1992 law requires the Energy Department to set efficiency standards for electricity distribution transformers, most of which are owned by utility companies and transmit power to homes and businesses. The department took no action until this October, when it issued standards scheduled to take effect in 2010.

In a statement in the Federal Register, the department declared that its standards "will achieve the maximum improvements in energy efficiency that are technologically feasible and economically justified." More stringent standards, the department said, would cause economic harm to the nation without significant environmental benefits.

Environmental groups challenged those statements. Ballo said utility companies had joined environmental organizations in seeking stronger standards that would reduce energy waste - saving the companies \$11.1 billion - and the need for more pollution-emitting power plants.

If the department simply required new transformers to be as efficient as the best equipment already on the market, environmental organizations said, enough energy would be saved to eliminate the need for nearly 20 large power plants by 2038.

That would also reduce the annual output of heat-trapping carbon dioxide by 700 million tons, more than the amount emitted by all U.S. cars, the groups said.

The Energy Department has said one reason it did not require greater efficiency was that there was no reliable way to measure the potential economic benefits from reducing carbon dioxide emissions.

State Deputy Attorney General Janill Richards, who filed the suit for Brown's office, noted that the Bush administration made the same argument in defense of its new miles-per-gallon standards for light trucks and SUVs.

An appeals court in San Francisco rejected those standards last month and said the administration must consider the effects of fuel consumption on global warming.

The court was "very clear - the federal government can't pretend any more that controlling emissions doesn't have value," Richards said.

She said California is also among the states that have filed a similar suit challenging new federal efficiency standards for commercial air conditioning and heating units.

The Energy Department did not respond Tuesday to a request for comment.

IOC Trying to Determine if Air Pollution Will Affect Athletes at Beijing Games

Washington Post Wednesday, December 12, 2007

Beijing Games organizers provided the International Olympic Committee with results of recent air quality tests to help gauge how pollution will affect Olympic athletes.

China is trying improve the quality of Beijing's air, and the IOC has said it might reschedule events if smog levels are too high.

The issue was reviewed by the IOC executive board during a video conference with Beijing organizers yesterday, less than eight months before the Aug. 8-24 Olympics.

Gilbert Felli, the IOC's Olympic Games executive director, said the Beijing committee turned over the findings from August when pollution-reduction measures were in place, including the removal of about 1.3 million of the city's 3 million cars from the road.