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8. AIR POLLUTION: San Joaquin Valley releases plan for meeting ozone standard

Arthur O'Donnell, special to *Greenwire*

Although California's San Joaquin Valley has substantially reduced its smog over the past two decades, it still has one of the nation's most stubborn air pollution problems.

The valley must cut pollution by 60 percent over the next seven years to meet federal ozone standards, local regulators say in a **draft** ozone attainment plan released this week.

Besides tightening what are already among the nation's toughest emissions curbs, the region must limit nitrogen oxide and volatile organic compound emissions by 480 tons per day by 2013. Failure could risk stringent penalties -- including a *de facto* moratorium on new business development and potential loss of \$2 billion per year in federal highway aid.

Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, said the district will spend up to \$1.5 billion a year beginning in 2008 to meet the eight-hour ozone standard by 2013. The district plans to buy and retire polluting cars, trucks and farm vehicles.

"The challenges we face are unmatched by any other region in the country," Sadredin said in an interview. "After we do everything we can by regulation, we estimate we still need \$7.5 billion to buy the rest of the reductions."

Says the draft plan: "Virtually all stationary sources of emissions in the Valley are already subject to stringent regulations, leaving few opportunities for major reductions." Because industry and other pollution sources are on their fourth or fifth generation of limits, further restrictions "are quickly reaching points of diminishing returns."

The district has successfully cut local NOx emissions by 37 percent since 1990, and it now has a lower emissions density than most other parts of the state. But the valley traps ozone and particulates, making it very difficult to meet ambient air quality standards.

"Once you've cut emissions by 90 percent," Sadredin said, "it's much more expensive to get that last 10 percent of reductions." Vehicle emissions are the cause of the valley's residual smog problems, which contributed to 81 violations of the federal 8-hour standard this year.

Only Los Angeles is smoggier

That put the valley behind the Los Angeles Basin, with 86 violations, as the nation's smoggiest area, and third behind Houston in terms of peak ozone readings. And it was much better than the 2003-05 period, during which the region averaged 105 days in violation per year. But new government standards aim to cut the allowed number to just a single violation per year.

The draft plan calls this "a daunting task." Even if the valley shuts down all of its businesses, banned all truck traffic, or prohibited all automobiles, it still would not be able to meet the standard. "Of course, these are extreme and unrealistic measures offered only to illustrate the magnitude of our problem," stated the report.

Still, the draft plan contemplates even more stringent regulation of stationary sources, new tail-pipe standards for on-road and off-road vehicles, and incentives to buy reductions from sources outside the district's jurisdiction. "Success will require bold, innovative actions by the district, the general public's willingness to make air-friendly

behavioral changes, better land-use decisions and community design to minimize vehicle traffic," the plan states.

To a large degree, the district is counting on state and federal regulations to attack vehicle pollution, because local regulators have no authority to control tailpipe emissions beyond offering incentives to retire older cars and replace diesel engines. But, even with potential implementation of a new California-specific auto efficiency standard, it could take decades to achieve needed reductions simply by attrition.

The district believes it will face a gap of approximately 312 tons per day between what it can expect from a variety of new state or local regulations and the 480 tons of reductions it needs to meet the 2013 deadline. Financial incentives could make up the difference, but the district must rely on state or federal funding sources to do so.

Sadredin said that the district is exploring other options for extending its attainment plan at a significantly reduced cost. If U.S. EPA allows the deadline to extend to 2021, the price tag would be about \$2.9 billion over 13 years; if the date is pushed to 2024, the cost is estimated at \$2 billion over 16 years.

Those figures are over and above the actual costs to local business of implementation of new rules being considered in the ozone plan, he added.

[Click here](#) for a copy of the draft "2007 Ozone Plan."

O'Donnell is an independent energy and environmental writer in San Francisco.

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