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### Too early for air standard extension?

#### State request to EPA irks Florez, local air regulators

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Last Updated: Monday, Mar 19 2007 11:34 PM

State air regulators came under heavy criticism Monday for looking into a possible delay in meeting the deadline for a federal clean air standard that comes due in 2015.

Under federal requirements, the state has until 2015 to clean up fine particulate matter pollution in areas including the San Joaquin Valley and Los Angeles air basins. In a March 12 letter to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the California Air Resources Board said it must "pursue the option of additional time" to meet that standard and suggested pushing back the deadline to 2020.

The letter comes on the heels of news last month from San Joaquin Valley air regulators that the region will not meet the deadline for another federal pollution standard for smog. The air district has requested a 10-year extension for that deadline, which would push it out to 2023.

The letter from the Air Resources Board states that the scope of California's particulate matter problem is unique in the nation. It goes on to say that federal regulations to phase in cleaner diesel engines take effect too late and won't have the needed impact for the region to meet the standard.

Diesel engines are one of the main contributors to fine particulate matter pollution.

The move was criticized by Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, local air regulators and clean air advocates.

"Who loses if there's a five-year delay?" asked Tim Carmichael, president of the Coalition for Clean Air. "The impact is on people who breathe air in California and that's millions of people."

Carmichael said the state acted prematurely because no formal plans have been put forth yet by local air districts to tackle particulate matter pollution and because the state didn't consult with air districts or the public about the extension.

Particulate matter lodges in the lungs and can aggravate asthma, lung disorders and heart disease.

In a letter to state air officials, Florez said: "To many, it appears that the ARB staff ... has decided to throw in the towel on (particulate matter) attainment."

Gennet Paauwe, a spokeswoman for the Air Resources Board, said the letter was not a formal request for an extension.

"The letter is really just exploring the option of getting an extension," she said. "The Air Resources Board is just kind of feeling out EPA to see if they would do that."

Paauwe added that state regulators believe the San Joaquin Valley can meet the particulate matter standard by the current deadline of 2015. The extension is geared toward the Los Angeles area, which faces a bigger problem with particulate matter pollution than the valley, she said.

But Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, said he's concerned about the implications an extension would have on the valley.

The valley's attempts to cut smog and particulate matter pollution rely heavily on the state and federal government passing regulations that mandate cleaner vehicles. Sadredin believes an extension to the deadline may cause the state to take more time implementing those regulations.

"The bottom line is we think it's premature to request an extension at this time," he said. "We think if it is granted it will take the pressure of them."

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