

California agency approves warehouse rule for air quality

May 8 2021, by Christopher Weber



A semi-truck turns into an Amazon Fulfillment center in Eastvale, Calif. on Thursday, Nov. 12, 2020. Southern California air quality regulators are considering a rule that would curb emissions from trucks that ferry goods from the growing number of massive warehouses run by Amazon and other companies. Areas around the facilities have weathered increased pollution affecting largely minority communities. The "warehouse rule" will be voted on, by the South Coast Air Quality Management District. (Watchara Phomicinda/The Orange County Register via AP)

Southern California air quality regulators on Friday approved a rule that would curb diesel emissions from thousands of trucks that ferry goods from the growing number of massive warehouses in the region run by Amazon and other companies.

Areas around the facilities have weathered increased pollution affecting their largely [minority communities](#).

The so-called warehouse rule was approved 9-4 by the South Coast Air Quality Management District board.

It institutes a points-based system requiring about 3,000 distribution centers to choose from a menu of options to reduce or offset emissions. Those could include choices such as replacing diesel trucks and other equipment with electric models, putting in rooftop solar panels or installing air filters at nearby schools or day care centers.

"Warehouse operators could prepare and implement a custom plan specific to their site, or they could pay a mitigation fee," the proposal read. The fees would go toward funding similar air quality improvements in surrounding neighborhoods.

South Coast district officials said they acted in order to meet federal smog-reduction deadlines in 2023 and 2031.

The Air Quality Management District said in a socioeconomic impact assessment report earlier this year that the regulations would provide public health benefits worth \$2.7 billion from 2022 to 2031—including 5,800 fewer asthma attacks and 300 fewer deaths.

Environmental and activist groups praised the vote, saying it will reduce

pollution while providing local clean energy jobs.

The rule "is the first step in eliminating toxic emissions from one of the nation's largest and most profitable industries," said a joint statement from the Sierra Club, Earthjustice, People's Collective for Environmental Justice and the Partnership for Working Families.

"Squinting through the smog, California is charting a better future for the sake of our lungs, " said Adrian Martinez of Earthjustice. "The health benefits will be immense, but the Indirect Source Rule is just the beginning. The way we move goods in this country has got to be electric, for the sake of clean air and a breathable future."



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But the Los Angeles County Business Federation said the rule amounts to an unauthorized job-killing tax and called the Air Quality Management District's action "irresponsible" and "a travesty."

"The staff advised the board that this rule and tax will eliminate tens of thousands of jobs, with no evidence it will actually reduce emissions," the business group said. "What's more, these job losses will disproportionately impact communities of color, the same communities the board is claiming to support. This is not how public policy should be made."

B.J. Patterson, chief executive of Pacific Mountain Logistics, which employs more than 65 people at a 200,000-square-foot (18,580-square meter) warehouse in San Bernardino, told the Los Angeles Times that he didn't know which of the compliance options his company would select.

Most of the forklifts used inside are already electric, he said, and he does not control which trucks come in and out.

Opting to pay the mitigation fees would cost his business close to \$200,000 a year, he estimated.

Environmental and community groups have for years pushed for tighter regulations to help neighborhoods inundated with smog-forming nitrogen

oxides from trucks driving to and from sprawling warehouse complexes owned by Amazon and other distributors across the inland region east of Los Angeles.

"These communities are often disadvantaged and people of color. So it's part of our ongoing commitment to address the [environmental justice](#) inequity, as well as addressing the overall regional air quality pollution," Wayne Natri, the South Coast district's executive officer, said a day before the vote.

More than 2.4 million people live within half a mile of at least one large warehouse, and those areas have higher rates of asthma and heart attacks, and are disproportionately Black and Latino, district officials said.

Presentation of the proposal began after board members honored clean-air trailblazer William A. Burke, who is retiring after 23 years as chairman.

"Today is historical. It couldn't be a better day to go home," Burke said.

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