



Alan C. Lloyd, Ph.D.
Agency Secretary

Air Resources Board

Cindy K. Tuck, Chair
1001 I Street • P.O. Box 2815
Sacramento, California 95812 • www.arb.ca.gov



Arnold Schwarzenegger
Governor

August 31, 2005

Ms. Lydia Wegman, Director
Air Quality Strategies and Standards Division
Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards
United States Environmental Protection Agency
Mail Drop C504-01
Research Triangle Park, North Carolina 27711

Dear Ms. Wegman:

This letter transmits our comments on United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) proposals related to natural and exceptional events for particulate matter (PM). Thank you for the opportunity to comment on proposals prior to the official public comment period. There are a number of significant issues regarding the proposal that we hope to work through with your staff as the process proceeds. To assist in that process, we provide the following initial comments.

Exclusion of PM10 from the Policy

Currently there are two primary policy documents that specify requirements for natural and exceptional events. These are the 1996 PM10 Natural Events Policy and the 1986 Exceptional Events Policy. The requirements discussed in the draft Staff Paper would only cover the PM2.5 standard and the PM coarse standard expected to be proposed by U.S. EPA later this year. This would result in three different sets of requirements applicable to different pollutants. Instead, we encourage U.S. EPA to move forward to align the requirements and reporting timeframes for all national standards. At a minimum, all particulate matter standards should be addressed in some form in one place to ensure a smooth transition from the PM10 standard to the PM coarse standard if that is the intention.

Timeframe

The existing timeframe in the 1996 PM10 Natural Events Policy, which allows states 180 days from the date of the occurrence of an event to submit documentation to U.S. EPA, has generally been sufficient. However, a shorter timeframe is problematic. This is due to the time needed for the filter analysis and data reporting that must precede the preparation of documentation and public notification. A timeframe triggered

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California Environmental Protection Agency

by the end of the quarter would not be sufficient time for an event that occurs near of that time period. Therefore, we recommend retaining the 180 day time clock.

Concentrations Below 24-hour PM Standard

We read the proposed policy to allow the flagging and exclusion of natural events which contribute to violations of the annual average standard without causing concentrations above the 24-hour standard. Given the three-year averaging form of the annual standard, U. S. EPA's policy should provide for documenting these natural events that contribute to exceedances of an annual standard. Specifically, we recommend that the policy address the flagging of all natural events within the 180-day period, with discretion to delay the documentation of every flagged natural event. This would allow events that contribute only to violations of the annual standard to be documented later in the context of the attainment demonstration plan. This will prevent the unnecessary expenditure of resources for documentation of every flagged event where violations of the annual standard do not occur.

Contribution Analysis

U.S. EPA is considering requiring States to quantify the contribution of emissions associated with a natural event to the measured exceedance. We believe this would be difficult to do in most cases. We rarely have reliable emissions estimates or speciated ambient data for highly variable events such as wildfires and windblown dust. This limits our ability to distinguish between different sources of dust and also limits the ability of modeling and data analysis approaches to determine quantitative impacts. In the absence of such data, states should have the flexibility to demonstrate that an exceedance was affected by a natural event, using a weight of evidence assessment of the air quality and meteorological conditions and surrounding emission sources.

Exceptional Events Action Plan

There should be some flexibility in the requirement for Exception Events Action Plans. States and localities should not be required to expend resources on an Exceptional Events Action Plan for unplanned and unpredictable events that may not occur again for many years, if ever.

Ms. Lydia Wegman
August 31, 2005
Page 3

Once again, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment. If you would like to further discuss our comments, please feel free to contact Ms. Linda Murchison, Chief, Planning and Technical Support Division at (916) 322-5350, or Ms. Karen Magliano, Manager, Particulate Matter Analysis Section, at (916) 322-7137.

Sincerely,

/s/

Lynn Terry
Deputy Executive Officer

cc: next page

Ms. Lydia Wegman
August 31, 2005
Page 4

cc: Mr. Bob Lebens
Western States Air Resources Council (WESTAR)
500 Union Street, Suite 640
Seattle, Washington 98101

Mr. Larry Wallace
Integrated Policy and Strategies Group
Air Quality Strategies and Standards Division
Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards
United States Environmental Protection Agency
Mail Drop C504-02
Research Triangle Park, North Carolina 27711

Ms. Amy Royden-Bloom, Senior Staff Associate
State and Territorial Air Pollution Program Administration
444 N. Capitol Street NW, Suite 307
Washington, D.C. 20001

Ms. Linda Murchison, Chief
Planning and Technical Support Division

Ms. Karen Magliano, Manager
Particulate Analysis Section