

AQMD approves 15-year plan to improve air quality

By Anthony Victoria
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Photo/Michael Segura: Members of environmental group, East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice, holding up signs that read "#WeAreJustTryingToBreathe" during the South Coast Air Quality Management District's meeting on March 3, 2017. The air quality district approved a 15-year plan to improve Southern California's air quality.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District passed their 15 year air regulatory plan on Friday after much deliberation and debate.

Southern California's air regulatory board chose to approve a plan that intends to collaborate with stakeholders to reduce emissions, rather than set heavy regulations.

Several board members introduced amendments to the plan that emphasized the use of cleaner technologies, accelerated nitrogen oxide reductions, the elimination of the disputed Regional Clean Air Incentives Market (RECLAIM) program, and stricter regulations on airports, ports, public fleets, and warehouses.

Some members criticized the indirect source rule—regulations that would have demanded warehouses and other structures that attract mobile pollutants to decrease their emission output. AQMD board member and San Bernardino County Supervisor Janice Rutherford believes an indirect source ruling would have a negative effect on the Inland Empire’s booming logistics industry. She chose to vote against the proposed amendments.

“This industry is what gets people out of poverty and into the middle class,” explained Rutherford. “If we here are concerned about public health, we have to consider the effect that potentially killing those jobs will have on the people we represent.”

The Air Quality Management Plan, initially discussed last month, has brought forth hundreds of testimonies from both environmentalists and industry. The \$16 billion [plan](#), first introduced in June 2016, hopes to alleviate local concerns with respiratory illness by cutting emissions by almost half. It will also provide approximately \$1 billion in incentives to encourage industry to adopt cleaner technology.

Los Angeles Supervisor Sheila Kuehl, a newcomer to the SCAQMD, was convinced last month that the plan needed [“more teeth.”](#) Her five proposed amendments aimed to give the agency more regulatory power to hold airport, port, warehouse, and fleet operators accountable.

Kuehl said her proposed amendments to control indirect sources wouldn’t undermine the progress industry has made to rollback pollution, but instead place a measure to take legal action in case reduction goals are not met.

“The intention of the rule is not to be applied, so long as the ports continue to do what [Los Angeles] Councilman [Joe] Buscaino has indicated they do,” Kuehl said in response

to Buscaino's claims that port operators plan to agree to emission reduction goals. "A contract is great so long as no one violates it. We would not be applying the rules so long as the ports are doing what you say they are doing."

Kuehl's amendments on port and warehouse regulation were voted down by the board.

The Supervisor did succeed in adding provisions to the plan to seek authority from the California Air Resources Board to require public agencies to use near zero emission and zero emission trucks.

"You win a few, you lose a few," Kuehl said to dozens of environmentalists outside the SCAQMD's headquarters in Diamond Bar. "But you move in the right direction. Nothing ever happens without a movement, nothing ever happens without organizing."

The board also passed an amendment to assure the termination of RECLAIM. Introduced by Rolling Hills Estates Councilwoman Judith Mitchell, the amendment assures the elimination of the cap and trade program that allowed oil refineries, power plants, and factories to buy and sell credits. SCAQMD officials say the program failed to achieve expected reductions.

Mitchell's amendment will also require 5 tons per day reduction in nitrogen oxide pollution from the aforementioned stationary sources.

Despite expressing dissatisfaction in the SCAQMD's rejection of further regulations on ports and warehouses, environmentalists affiliated with the Sierra Club, Earthjustice, and the California Environmental Justice Alliance revealed delight in the board's decision to pursue requirements for zero emission vehicles.

"That's big news because things like trash trucks pick up garbage but leave behind a lot of deadly air pollution in our neighborhoods," said Yassi Kavezade, the Sierra Club My Generation campaign's Inland Empire. "It's great that they moved the ball forward toward ensuring that the cars and trucks the public owns are clean and don't pollute the air we breathe."