

# Tougher climate change policy for Bay Area moves forward



The Chevron oil refinery is photographed in Richmond, Calif., on Tuesday, Sept. 2, 2014. (Doug Duran/Bay Area News Group)

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SAN FRANCISCO — The Bay Area’s air pollution board took a big step Wednesday toward becoming the first in America to cap greenhouse gas emissions from oil refineries.

Saying it is taking a leadership role on climate change, the air board agreed to move toward a June 21 vote on a pared down proposal to limit greenhouse gases on the Bay Area’s five oil refineries.

“This rule will be part of a larger effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions,” said Jack Broadbent, executive officer of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. “This action is important in light of the anticipated withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement by President Trump.”

The air district is on the verge of adopting the first local rule in the nation that caps greenhouse gas emissions from oil refineries, which are large generators of the pollutants

because of the big energy use to heat and treat crude oil to convert it into gasoline, diesel and other fuels.

A divided audience of some 200 people attended a meeting about the rule on Wednesday.

Oil refinery workers and petroleum company representatives were unhappy, saying the rule could limit production at the plants, cost jobs, and raise fuel prices.

Several speakers accused the pollution agency of being captive to interests of environmental groups determined to phase out carbon-based fuels.

The board didn't adopt the rule itself Wednesday when 11th-hour changes were unveiled at the start of a public hearing.

But on a 16-3 vote, the air board agreed to advance a revised rule draft to a public hearing and vote on June 21.

John Gioia, a regional air board member on the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors, said the air district is on the verge of a historic vote to show how local agencies can contribute to the struggle to stem climate change.

"This is a historic moment. It shows the Bay Area and California are serious about cleaning the environment and reducing greenhouse gases," said Gioia, also a member of the California Air Resources Board. "Our board and the state have heard the doom and gloom stories about new rules for decades, but the bottom line is the Bay Area economy is strong, job growth has been robust, and we have made the environment cleaner."

Karen Mitchoff, another Contra Costa County supervisor on the regional air board, opposed the rule, however, saying she is worried the limits will harm jobs.

Mitchoff said the California Air Resources Board has given mixed messages about the cap rule.

"I'm very disappointed with CARB," Mitchoff said.

On Wednesday, top managers at the air district proposed narrowing the refinery rule to impose limits only on greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane linked to global warming.

Previously, the pollution district also had proposed to set refinery-wide caps for other pollutants that contribute to smog and fine soot particles, the latter which can lead to strokes and premature deaths.

But air district staff said Wednesday that capping the soot and smog pollutants could interfere with state and federal permit requirements applying to refineries.

Greg Karras, a senior scientist at Communities for a Better Environment, said limiting greenhouse gases at refineries also will lead to reductions in other pollutants that increase health risks for those living near oil refineries.

“The staff proposal is not enough,” Karras said, “but it’s a good first step.”

He said refinery caps are needed to prevent the fuel-making plants from increasing pollution if they switch to dirtier crude oil sources such as from Canadian tar sand fields.

Oil refiners also said the rule could end up having no impact on global climate change. Oil refining could shift from the Bay Area to states with more lenient environmental laws, providing no net reduction in greenhouse gases, oil industry representatives said.

Oil refineries are the largest single industrial source of greenhouse gases in the Bay Area.

The Bay Area’s five refineries are Chevron in Richmond, Shell in Martinez, Valero in Benicia, Tesoro north of Concord, Phillips 66 in Rodeo.