

Panel kills bid to halt Canyon emissions tests

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The action comes after Gov. Butch Otter expresses opposition, saying the EPA regulations could be worse.

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A last-ditch effort by a Nampa lawmaker to thwart the testing failed on a 6-5 vote in the House Environment Committee on Wednesday, all but ensuring that vehicles will be tested for pollutants come June 1.

Rep. Steven Kren, R-Nampa, and 10 colleagues representing Canyon County wanted to overhaul a 2008 law that gave the Department of Environmental Quality authority to establish the tests. The law's goal is to control pollution in airsheds that are approaching nonattainment of federal clean-air standards.

That bill was long debated and passed both chambers of the Legislature with bipartisan support in close votes. Kren's House Bill 591 would have reassigned the DEQ authority to local governments, especially in Canyon County.

Canyon County and its cities had proposed the voluntary system with the incentive of a lottery to get people to test their cars. The winner would get a \$5,000 prize. The county planned to put up \$50,000 to help people pay for the repairs if their cars didn't pass the test.

"The (county) commissioners felt their hands were tied when they looked at other ways to reduce emissions," Kren said.

Gov. Butch Otter, in a rare comment on pending legislation, told the Idaho Press Club on Wednesday morning that he did not favor Kren's bill and questioned some of his data. The federal government will become involved if Idaho is unable to keep its pollution in check, he said, suggesting its edicts could be onerous.

"Doing nothing has terrible consequences," Otter said. "The EPA has a much broader brush than what we've got."

The ozone level in the Treasure Valley airshed has averaged 71 parts per billion over the last three years. The federal standard for nonattainment is 75 parts per billion. Citing recent public-health studies, the EPA recently signaled that it plans to lower the threshold to somewhere between 60 and 70 parts per billion.

Air quality in the Treasure Valley has improved in the past two years, said Toni Hardesty, the director of the Department of Environmental Quality. She attributes that to cooler summer temperatures and poor economic conditions that have kept cars off the road.

Still, she said, "You should know the area would still trigger this regulation" as

TESTING IN CANYON COUNTY

Systech International will set up 20 vans across Canyon County and two in Kuna starting June 1. Tests will cost \$11 or less and be required every other year, starting this year for cars made in even-numbered years and in 2011 for cars from odd-numbered years. Cars made before 1981 or less than 5 years ago are exempt. So are electric or hybrid cars.

the Valley's pollution level remains at 94.7 percent of the federal standards — well above the 85 percent level established for action in the 2008 legislation.

Ozone pollution results from the combination of oxides of nitrogen and volatile organic compounds plus sunlight. The EPA says that 56 percent of nitrogen oxides comes from motor vehicles, while 45 percent of volatile organic compounds come from motor vehicles.

A chart Kren has been using to promote his legislation shows that motor vehicles are not among the Valley's top two emission sources, trailing far behind industrial sources, agricultural activities and wood burning. That could be important because the 2008 law authorizes vehicle emissions tests only if vehicles are one of the top two sources.

Otter suggested the information Kren has is incorrect.

Canyon County commissioners last week sent a letter to DEQ saying they would not subject the 200 county vehicles to testing. They called their refusal an act of "civil disobedience."

They believe they have been locked out of the process and are skeptical that emissions testing will solve the air quality problems. The state hopes to remove 252 tons of nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds a year from Canyon County.

"We don't think this plan is going to work," said Dave Ferdinand, chairman of the Canyon County Commission. Commissioner Steve Rule said the county is not getting credit for steps that it has taken to improve air quality, including regulating paint shops and switching its sheriff's fleet to E85 gasoline.

Rep. Brian Cronin, D-Boise, disputed the notion that the county did not have sufficient time to prepare an alternative to emissions testing. The law allows 120 days to develop alternatives, though Cronin said the county has had far longer.

"It just seems like a dead horse we've beaten mercilessly," Cronin said.

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