

BILL ANALYSIS

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AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

The arrival of the 2009 ozone season brings critical challenges for Central and South Central Texas, where rapid population growth threatens to compromise air quality by raising ozone-forming emissions.

High levels of ground-level ozone can be a health hazard, especially for children, seniors, and people who suffer from lung disease or are active outdoors. Studies link excessive ozone exposure to lung irritation and inflammation, breathing difficulties, headaches, nausea, aggravated asthma, reduced lung capacity, and increased susceptibility to such respiratory illnesses as pneumonia and bronchitis; chronic high-level exposure can cause permanent lung damage.

To protect the health and well-being of the public, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) strengthened its National Ambient Air Quality Standard for ground-level ozone in 2008. Monitored ozone levels in the Capital Region, which includes Travis, Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, and Williamson Counties, and in the Alamo Region, which includes Bexar, Comal, Guadalupe, and Wilson Counties, slightly exceeded the new standards in 2006-2008, putting the area at risk of receiving a "nonattainment" designation when the EPA makes its final determinations in March 2010; this designation would trigger federal requirements for transportation and industry that could in turn increase costs for businesses and delay regionally significant transportation projects.

The Capital and Alamo Regions can avert the nonattainment designation if they decrease ozone levels to 77 parts per billion or less and 78 parts per billion or less, respectively; an unprecedented level of regional cooperation is needed to meet this goal. Consequently, the Central Texas Clean Air Coalition, the Air Improvement Resources Committee, local governments in the two regions, the Capital Area Council of Governments, the Alamo Area Council of Governments, and the CLEAN AIR Force of Central Texas have created an initiative called the Big Push to build on voluntary efforts already in place.

In support of the Big Push, the Central and South Central Texas regions are implementing an outreach campaign to encourage everyone to be an Ozone Action Hero and to pledge to do what they can to voluntarily reduce ozone-forming emissions from April through October 2009.

Because many small actions can combine to produce a significant result, the coalition is asking all area governments, agencies, businesses, and citizens for their assistance. Individuals can help through such measures as driving less, idling their vehicles less, and waiting until evening to fuel vehicles or use gas and diesel yard equipment. Many area employers have committed to join this effort by establishing policies to reduce their vehicle and operational emissions and by implementing such measures as ozone watch/warning programs and assisting employees in reducing the impact of their commutes through teleworking, carpooling, using mass transit, bicycling, or scheduling a compressed workweek.

The largest employer in the Central Texas region is the State of Texas; state agencies can play a vital role in the Big Push by conducting evaluations of fleet usage, providing secure bike racks and preferential parking for ride sharing and low-emissions vehicles, choosing to teleconference, limiting use of gas and diesel equipment early in the day and on ozone watch/warning days, and enacting other policies to reduce harmful emissions.

State agencies can also contribute to the endeavor by publicizing the Texas State Employee Commute Solutions Fair, which is to be held from 11 a.m. until 1 p.m. on Wednesday, April 22, 2009, at the Stephen F. Austin state office building, and by encouraging employees to attend the fair.

By joining the Big Push to reduce ozone-forming emissions in Central and South Central Texas, the state can protect the health of residents and help avoid a nonattainment designation from the EPA, thus preventing enforcement of burdensome regulatory requirements that would add to the cost of doing business in Central and South Central Texas.

RESOLVED

That the secretary of state forward an official copy of this resolution to the executive director of each state agency.