

# Calif. adopts nation's first mandate for low-carbon fuels

CALIFORNIA air regulators on Thursday, April 23, adopted a first-in-the nation mandate for low-carbon fuels, telling the petroleum industry that it must help combat global warming by offering cleaner-burning alternatives.

The standards approved by the California Air Resources Board are expected to create a new market for alternative fuels and set the stage for a national debate on the future of the country's transportation system.

"I think we're creating the framework for a new way of looking at automotive fuels where no longer will gasoline derived by petroleum be the only game in town," board Chairwoman Mary Nichols said.

The action comes as Congress is debating a national climate bill that features a low-carbon fuel standard modeled after California's. President Barack Obama also has supported the idea.

California's standard calls for cutting the carbon content of the fuels sold in California by 10 percent by 2020. It does so using a groundbreaking approach, by counting all the emissions required to deliver gasoline and diesel to California consumers—from drilling a

new oil well or planting corn to transporting it to gas stations.

Environmentalists, public health representatives and supporters of alternative fuels called the action historic. They said the rules are critical to helping California meet its goals to cut greenhouse gas emissions and hoped they would promote the further development of vehicles powered by electricity, natural gas and hydrogen.

The air board voted 9-1 to adopt the rules, with member Ronald Loveridge absent.

Some representatives of the ethanol industry, which had expected to profit from the low-carbon mandate, argued that California's new rules would leave them out. They said regulators overstated the negative environmental effects of making corn-based ethanol.

They were especially critical of the air board's decision to tie global deforestation and other land conversions to biofuel production in the United States.

For example, air board scientists said that Brazil has converted rain forest into soybean plantations as a direct result of the growth in corn-based ethanol in the US. As farmers here plant more corn and fewer soybean fields, other countries must find a way to make up the difference.

The destruction of forests and grasslands elsewhere to do that would count against ethanol producers in the US under the formula adopted by the Air Resources Board. That's because of the greenhouse gases emitted when the trees are burned and the soil is tilled for crops.

Representatives of the ethanol industry told the board it was unfair to penalize them for agricultural land changes outside the US. They said that corn and soybean exports increased last year, along with ethanol production.

"Rain forest deforestation in Brazil has been cut in half despite the fact ethanol production has been increased by a factor of four or five," said retired Gen. Wesley Clark, co-chairman of Growth Energy, a coalition of ethanol companies.

Ethanol producers also complained about unfairness, saying the air board had failed to hold oil and gas companies accountable for similar consequences tied to their operations. Nichols said the board would further assess those emissions but noted that drilling for oil does not typically have a negative effect beyond the finite area where it takes place.

One air board member said he would vote against the rule because dozens of US scientists had questioned the agency's decision to estimate the emissions tied to land-use changes.

"I have a hard time accepting the fact that we're going to ignore the comments of 125 scientists," board member John Telles said. "They said the model was not good enough."

Some in the petroleum industry warned that California was moving too quickly without any assurances that the alternative fuels they will be required to sell will be available for a mass market. Representatives asked the board to delay a decision until next year.

"It's frankly unclear to us how we will comply with this regulation," said Catherine Reheis-Boyd, chief operating officer of the Western States Petroleum Association.

Representatives for BP PLC and Chevron Corp. said that their companies supported the new standards, with the caveat that the board periodically review the standards. In response, the air board agreed to ensure that the most up-to-date science is incorporated into the rule and that the alternative fuels have become available as expected.

"I think we sometimes make assumptions that certain things are going to happen and they just don't happen," said board member Barbara Riordan. (AP)

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