

New rule targets air pollution at Southern California rail yards

Goal is to remove 10 1/2 tons of emissions a day, regulators say

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Freight rail yards in Southern California will have to add clean-air technology under a new rule from a pollution-fighting agency.

The [South Coast Air Quality Management District](#) board [has approved the Freight Rail Yards Indirect Source Rule](#), which is expected to remove 10 1/2 tons a day of toxic nitrogen oxide emissions from the air between 2027 and 2050.

“While there is no single rule or regulation that can achieve federal air quality standards on its own, today’s adoption is a big step in the right direction,” board chairperson and former state Sen. Vanessa Delgado said in a news release of the Friday, Aug. 2, vote.

“There are so many communities, parks and schools that are surrounded and affected by sources associated with rail yards that will directly benefit from today’s action.”

A railroad industry trade group opposes the rule, saying it’s superseded by federal law and will interfere with rail operations.

The district, which is led by a board of elected officials from across Southern California, is responsible for improving air quality in Orange County and parts of Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

Freight trains are essential to Southern California’s massive goods movement industry, which connects the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach with Inland Empire warehouses and store shelves and doorsteps throughout the nation.

While logistics is a cornerstone of the local economy, air pollution linked to diesel trucks and rail yards is blamed for cancer, asthma and other health problems, especially among people of color and blue-collar communities living near the ports and warehouses.

Rail yards account for about 9% of smog-forming emissions in the region, according to the air quality district. The new rule targets emissions from locomotives, drayage trucks, cargo-handling equipment and refrigerators at 25 rail yards.

The rule requires rail yard owners and operators to report on how they plan to use zero-emission technology to meet state and federal goals for reducing air pollution. It applies to new and existing rail yards.

The rule, which took seven years to develop with public input, will take effect if and when the federal Environmental Protection Agency approves it, along with a California Air Resources Board rule [applying to locomotives](#) and drayage truck fleets.

In a Tuesday, July 30, [letter to the air district](#), the [Association of American Railroads](#) wrote that, while the trade group shares the district's goal of slashing air pollution, the rail yards rule is flawed and "unfeasible and unworkable."

Freight trains are more fuel efficient and emit less pollution than trucks, and while rail yards are already using zero-emission equipment, zero-emission locomotives are not yet commercially viable, the association argued.

The federal government, not the states, oversees the railroad industry, and allowing the new rule to take effect would create a burdensome, state-by-state patchwork of regulations, the association said.

The air quality district also uses a flawed model to calculate rail yard emissions, the association added in its letter, which is co-signed by executives with the Union Pacific and Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroads.

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