Utah Adopting California-Style Rules for Air Pollution

PAUL FOY,Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — As Utah's air quality worsens, state regulators are working on a set of plans to limit everyday emissions, from banning the sale of aerosol deodorants and hair spray to prohibiting wood burning in fireplaces more often.

Regulators say dozens of new rules will take effect by August for 2 million of Utah's residents along the Wasatch Front. Utah could lose federal highway funds if it doesn't start reducing pollution along the urban corridor by December 2014.

The new regulations will force California-style changes in consumer products, with spray pumps replacing aerosols or aerosols switching to environmentally friendly propellants. Likewise, regulators are tightening limits on volatile organic compounds in paints, coatings and solvents — local factories and car-repair shops will have to buy reformulated products or install special emissions controls.

Regulators already have adopted an air-pollution plan for largely rural Cache County that calls for vehicle emissions tests over the opposition of local officials.

"There's nobody that likes what we're doing," said David McNeill of the Utah Division of Air Quality. "We're going after everybody."

Northern Utah's urbanized valleys have the nation's worst air at times, an accident of weather and geography. In winter, cold, stagnant air often settles in the bowl-shaped mountain basins, trapping tailpipe and other emissions that have no way of escaping.

The filth can last in the air for days at a time. Air pollution exceeded federal limits Wednesday as a blanket of smog covered Salt Lake and neighboring Davis counties.

Cache, Utah and Weber counties were approaching the federal limit as a temperature inversion or warmer air aloft kept cold, dirty air closer to the ground from circulating.

"The only thing that can break it up is another storm," said Bryce Bird, director of the Utah Division of Air Quality. That wasn't in the forecast.

Wood burning was prohibited for a third day along the Wasatch Front. Authorities urged motorists to limit driving and called on "sensitive" people to stay indoors.

Exposure to the brew of pollutants — soot, dust and gaseous chemicals — can constrict blood vessels, send pressure soaring and make hearts flutter, according to Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment, a group raising the alarm over the

region's pollution.

The doctors say young children and fetuses in the womb are at risk of acquiring developmental disorders.

Tailpipe emissions account for more than half the pollution. Regulators are looking at requiring employers of more than 100 to let some people work from home or offer subsidized mass transit or flexible scheduling. Staggered work hours could cut down on rush-hour traffic.

Industries, meanwhile, could be subject to an "offset" rule: If they want to expand operations, they'll have to cut overall emissions.

Regulators aren't overlooking smaller measures. They are poised to prohibit the sale of furnaces or gas fireplaces that still use old-style pilot lights instead of electronic ignition. Pilot lights burn a small amount of natural gas continuously.

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