

DEQ active, but hesitant

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BY: SAM LUVISI SUBLETTE EXAMINER

The Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) says it is working extra hard with industry in Sublette County to reduce wintertime ozone precursors, research the causation and potential ways to decrease the parts per billion (ppb) and to comply with the 75 ppb reset as the standard in September by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – but officials say a lot of the work ahead seems uncertain.

“Until the EPA comes out with new proposals all anyone has to go by is the stuff that came out years ago, which it won’t exactly be the same,” DEQ Air Quality Administrator Steven Dietrich told the Examiner Friday, adding the classification (which the DEQ and industry suspect will be the least stringent: “marginal”) will dictate where the agency looks to make additional reductions. The final designations are to be made May 21.

Currently, in Sublette County outside of the Jonah Field, many older developed fields are working on permits issued 10 to 15 years ago, unless they have been modified. The new classification could potentially open up DEQ’s revisiting this issue, according to Dietrich, who said that when they “actually get into non-attainment and have to look for additional reductions” they might have to look outside the Jonah-Pinedale area.

Another ambiguous issue is the potential of an even lower ozone standard to be issued by the EPA in 2013 (likely finalized by 2014), which could mean that the county could be re-designated as non-attainment, leaving another couple years for DEQ to work on coming into compliance once again.

The reinstated standard, implemented in 2008 by then-EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson in disagreement with his science advisory panel’s recommendation of 60 to 70 ppb, was suspended three years ago with EPA intentions to revisit and potentially introduce a standard more in line with the scientific reviews.

Then, in September the EPA decided it would enforce the Bush administration standard at 75 ppb.

“The EPA is gonna have to come up with some answers,” said Dietrich, who added that because this kind of overlap has never occurred before and Sublette County operators will be well along with coming into compliance with the current standard – what will happen in the coming years is still vague.

The DEQ held a public meeting Tuesday in Pinedale to inform the community of their latest efforts, including studies completed in 2011. Among other conclusions, the studies saw them looking at changes in which meteorology criteria they used for development of ozone episodes, how they evaluate snow cover and critical weather parameters and how VOC reactivity concentrations work specifically in winter-ozone formation, compared to the traditionally urban-based Maximum Incremental Reactivity (MIR) scale. This created the need for new, fully three-dimensional models in the Upper Green River Basin (UGRB).

Efforts taken prior to this winter to determine which emission reductions could take place were also reviewed. These included the studies, multiple meetings in 2011 with industry on how to reduce high ozone days, new emissions testing equipment and independent evaluations of emissions data from engines operating around the state – which was not formal, but showed a significant number of engines not operating correctly, said Dietrich. Most companies were very accommodating and the DEQ “did not give a lot of notice” prior to the tests, he added.

DEQ presented precursor emission reductions from the past several years including the 23.5-percent reduction in VOC emission from 2009 to 2012, despite a 2.9-percent increase from 2010 to 2011. Dietrich accounted for this as improved emissions inventories – or an “increase in number of companies who are reporting good data.”

Daily NOx emissions in the proposed nonattainment area from 2009 to 2011 went to just above 14 tons per day (tpd) compared to 30.1 tpd in 2007 and 21.0 tpd in 2008 (although those studies were exclusively focused on Sublette County).

“Obviously, something out there is paying off,” said Dietrich, who also shared the names of the 26 companies involved in the voluntary Ozone Contingency Plans, or short-term emission reduction actions that can be implemented with 24-hour advance notice from the AQD, as well as collaborations with the Sublette County Local Emergency Planning Committee to promote community and smaller service and production companies’ involvement in reducing ozone precursor

emissions.

Also reviewed was a voluntarily emission reduction policy DEQ issued in October 2011, which looks to give credit to energy companies for additional accomplishments (outside of Ozone Contingency Plans) – without losing efforts already gained or relieving operators of meeting EPA requirements as the county prepares for the non-attainment issuance.

“We encouraged industry to step up early reductions for this winter season, but also to get additional projects for the future and beyond,” said Dietrich at the meeting, with additional actions including proposed gas field electrification in the works with Rocky Mountain Power (RMP).

While only four companies (Chevron, BP, Shell and Exxon) submitted formal commitment letters for these additional actions, some might have taken additional steps without making commitments to the DEQ.

Mike Shaffron of Encana shared what his company has done, despite not having submitted a commitment letter. He said that Wyoming has the strictest Best Available Control Technologies (BACT) in the nation – with the most stringent regulations applied to the Jonah-Pinedale development areas – and that Encana has met those standards for some time.

“We’re not so worried. ... We’ve been doing it for several years,” he said. “I want to give the DEQ credit for advancing on that.”

A new Upper Green River Basin air quality “Citizens Advisory Task Force” was presented by DEQ Director John Corra, who said there are already many requests for engagements and that Gov. Matt Mead “has keen interest” for providing a vehicle for the group. The group looks to be by invitation-only with 26 individuals from towns and county governments, DEQ, Bureau of Land Management, the Governor’s office, the U.S. Forest Service, Public Health officials, oil and gas industry as well as citizens. The group will give the DEQ periodic reports of issues, recommendations and initiatives.

Also shared were projects underway, including an epidemiologic study with the Wyoming Department of Health of the effects of ozone on citizens in the non-attainment area.

Some attending the meeting Tuesday were pleased with what seemed to be a new kind of commitment as the non-attainment designation is to be formalized, but many are still wary of what the future holds for Sublette County citizens.

“It’s always good to get updated and learn what has been done and planned for the future,” said Pinedale resident Mary Lynn Worl, a member of the Citizens United for Responsible Energy Development (CURED) who is not convinced that the projected 3,500 wells for the Normally Pressured Lance (NPL) is a smart move for the coming years.

“At the same time it’s frustrating to look at the amount of emissions that are still being emitted into our air, and wondering next year what is going to go on at the meeting, and the following year and the following year after that,” she said.

Fellow CURED member Elaine Crumpley was encouraged by the forthrightness at the DEQ meeting, while finding it strange that most in attendance at the meeting (where an estimated 50 were in attendance) were industry and state agency professionals.

She said she looks forward to when further action is taken on promises made in writing. While most of what she heard she already knew, Crumpley said some public comments showcased a need for more education on the subject of ozone, something she said CURED wants to tackle with a forum in the near future.

“It’s just too complicated for someone who is just coming into it.”