

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY BOARD AGENDA LETTER



Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
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Agenda Number:
Prepared on: 8/30/06
Department Name: Planning and Development
Department No.: 053
Agenda Date: 9/12/06
Placement: Administrative
Estimate Time: 1 hour on 9/26/06
Continued Item: NO
If Yes, date from:

G:\GROUP\ENERGY\WP\POLICY\Air Quality Thresholds – 2006\Interim Thresholds – Set BoS Hearing

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: John Baker, Director
Planning and Development Department

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SUBJECT: Interim Air Quality Thresholds to Reflect Those of the Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District

Recommendation(s): That the Board of Supervisors set a hearing for September 26, 2006, to consider an interim revision to the County's *Environmental Thresholds and Guidelines Manual*, Chapter 5, Air Quality Thresholds, Section C.2.a., (Long-Term/Operational Emission Thresholds – Zone Precursors (NO_x and ROC) that would reconcile the County's quantitative threshold of 25 pounds per day with that of the Air Pollution Control District.

Alignment with Board Strategic Plan: Goal I – An Efficient Government Able to Anticipate and Respond Effectively to the Needs of the Community.

Executive Summary and Discussion:

Environmental Thresholds of Significance:

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) sets forth a legal framework for identifying significant effects on the environment for discretionary actions taken by state and local governments that qualify as a "project" pursuant to the act. CEQA reserves the role of determining significance for the lead agency, pursuant to guiding limitations expressed by law. As recommended by the Governor's Office of Planning and Research, the County has adopted thresholds of significance as part of its *Environmental Thresholds and Guidelines Manual*. These thresholds indicate at what point a given environmental effect should be considered significant.

County guidelines for implementation of CEQA specify processes for revising the *Environmental Thresholds and Guidelines Manual*, as necessary to reflect new information or changed environmental circumstances.¹

¹ *Guidelines for the Implementation of the California Environmental Quality Act of 1970, As Amended*, 11/22/05 edition, p. 12.

The process typically requires public hearings before the Planning Commission in north and south county locations. The Planning Commission then forwards its recommendations on revisions to the Board of Supervisors for final consideration. However, the guidelines also outline an option for the Board to adopt interim revisions to thresholds without the foregoing public process. After adoption, interim revisions are subject to the typical process of hearings before the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors, when the *Environmental Thresholds and Guidelines Manual* is periodically updated.

Air Quality Thresholds:

Chapter 5 establishes thresholds for air quality, including a quantitative threshold of 25 pounds per day of nitrogen oxides (NO_x) or reactive organic compounds (ROC) as the air-quality threshold of significance applied to long-term operational emissions of a proposed project. This threshold was last modified in April of 1994 and reflected the threshold applied by the APCD. In 1995, the APCD became a separate district, and has since revised its threshold for NO_x and ROC emissions for stationary sources. Meanwhile, the County has not revised its threshold, causing it to be different, and more conservative, than the one employed by the APCD.

Staff is proposing to reconcile the difference in air-quality thresholds through a two-phased process. First, staff recommends an interim revision that would bring the County's threshold into agreement of where APCD staff believes the threshold should now rest. Second, staff recommends a more rigorous examination in collaboration with APCD and stakeholders to draft and consider a final threshold revision. This second phase would entail hearings by the County's Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors, as discussed above.

Mandates and Service Levels: County guidelines direct that the Environmental Thresholds and Guidelines used to comply with CEQA be amended periodically, as necessary to reflect new information or changed environmental circumstances. Efforts herein to reconcile quantitative differences between the County's air-quality thresholds and those of APCD would enhance customer service.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts: Staff costs to process the interim revision to the air-quality threshold are budgeted in the Planning and Development Department's FY 2006-07 budget, page D-302, under the operating-expenditure category of "Long-Range Planning."

Special Instructions: N/A

Concurrence: N/A