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NEWS

Oil, gas industry may face tougher air pollution rules

By **THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**

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DENVER—The Colorado oil and gas industry could face tougher air pollution regulations as the Front Range, including Denver, tries to meet stricter federal ozone standards.

The state tightened standards on the oil and gas industry in late 2006 to reduce ground-level ozone levels to meet federal requirements. Regulators said pollution from oil and gas production has increased with expanded drilling in northern Colorado while emissions from other sources have declined.

Last November's announcement that the Denver area is in violation of federal ozone limits and the subsequent decision to strengthen standards nationwide have prompted Colorado to clamp down even more.

Ground-level ozone, a key component of smog, is created when the sun bakes pollutants such as vehicle exhaust, wildfire smoke and vapors from everything from paint cans to oil and gas wells.

The state must come up with short- and long-term ways to cut ozone levels, said Mike Silverstein, manager of planning and policy for the state air pollution control division.

Silverstein said during a Regional Air Quality Council meeting Thursday that the state is proposing stronger controls on tanks at natural gas wells that store liquids and other byproducts.

The other recommendation pared from a list of more than 10 is installing pneumatic devices, used to control gas and liquid flows, that emit fewer natural gas vapors.

The plan is to take comments from the industry, local regulators and environmental groups and present proposals to the regional and state air quality panels by late summer.

"We feel these are the most effective strategies," Silverstein said.

The proposals would apply just to the nine-county area stretching from Douglas County, south of Denver, to Larimer County, north of the Denver area. It includes Weld County, northeast of Denver, which has nearly 12,900 active oil and gas wells, the most in the state.



Members of a coalition of environmental groups and local governments suggested that regulators consider pollution controls for other gas-field equipment, including some of the engines and dehydrators.

Industry representatives have argued that oil and gas companies are being unfairly singled out as the Front Range struggles to comply with federal ozone levels.

Regulations adopted in 2006 required oil and gas companies in northeastern Colorado to cut emissions by 75 percent, more stringent than the former standard of 47.5 percent. The state air quality control commission also imposed the first-ever statewide pollution controls on oil and gas operations because of the growing number of wells there.

Natural gas production was considered the likely source of high ozone levels in February in western Wyoming that spawned the state's first-ever ozone warnings.

Ozone is a colorless gas that is health treat to children and people with respiratory problems.

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment Ozone Reduction Efforts:

<http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/ap/ozone.html>

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