

Port of Hueneme to curb ships' diesel pollution

By Stephanie Hoops

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A \$9 million utility power system is being developed at the Port of Hueneme to comply with new regulations requiring that ships anchored at California ports turn off their engines to limit emissions.

The vessels carry bananas and fruit from Central and South America and, to stay refrigerated, they run diesel auxiliary engines while docked at the port. Their engines have also powered shipboard cranes used to unload cargo, as the Port of Hueneme doesn't have overhead cranes.

In coming years, they'll plug into a land-based utility power system that will allow the vessels to shut down their diesel engines and keep nitrogen oxide and particulate matters out of the air.

Nitrogen oxide and particulate matters emitted at the port make up 2 percent of those overall emissions in Ventura County. Sixty-four tons of smog-producing nitrogen oxide is emitted into Ventura County's air every day and 1.2 tons come from the port, according to the Ventura County Air Pollution Control District. But the real concern is the 0.9 tons of particulate matter that looks like black soot going into the air, said the district's executive officer, Mike Villegas.

The particulate matter is carcinogenic (causes cancer) and the reduction in diesel particulate will result in public health benefits for residents who live as close as 400 meters to the berths, Villegas said.

The goal is to get the utility-based system running by Dec. 31, 2013 and get 80 percent to 100 percent of emissions reduced by 2020, said Anthony Taormina, executive director of the Oxnard Harbor District, which oversees the port.

Taormina has had discussions with the vessels' European owners, who will have to spend an estimated \$400,000 to modify the vessels for the new power connections.

"It's like trying to run a 1959 Chevrolet to meet today's air standards," he said.

The program is meant to bring the port into compliance with regulations approved in 2007 by the California Environmental Protection Agency's Air Resources Board. They call for a reduction in emissions from diesel auxiliary engines on container, passenger and refrigerated-cargo ships while anchored at California ports, gradually slowing emissions through 2020, when they must be reduced by 80 percent.

Earlier this month the port submitted an application for state funds to offset the cost by 50 percent.

At a recent board meeting, Oxnard Harbor Commissioner Jason Hodge called the port a "major polluter" and said he's pleased to see a "groundbreaking project" moving forward.

Commissioner Jess Herrera said it's not accurate to look at the port as a major polluter.

"We have customers that pollute," he said, adding that \$4.5 million is not easy to come up with and the port is doing its best to do so.

Local environmentalists at the meeting were encouraged by the coming changes.

"I think this is a very worthwhile project," said David Rodriguez, a spokesman for the far West region of the League of United Latin American Citizens.

Los Padres Sierra Club Conservation Chair Trevor Smith sees the system as a step in the right direction.

"I was impressed with the details and the enthusiasm of the directors to 'green the port,'" he said.