

## A chance to clear the air

### Public hearing will focus on timber companies' request for extension on deadline for reducing pollutants

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Air quality advocates are fuming over a proposal that would give three local timber companies another year to install equipment that would reduce toxic or cancer-causing pollutants by 168 tons annually.

"It's a delay tactic," said Central Point resident Wally Skyрман, who was a member of the local Coalition to Improve Air Quality.

Sierra Pine and Timber Products, both in Medford, and Rogue Valley Plywood in White City are required to install millions of dollars in equipment to clean up hazardous byproducts of plywood or particle board production such as methanol, phenol and two carcinogens, formaldehyde and acetaldehyde, according to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.

Timber company officials say they need a one-year extension because the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency rules have shifted over the years and court cases have made it difficult to settle on a particular technology for cleaning up the pollutants.

"The rules were changed for industry in the 11th hour," said David Lynch, environmental manager for Sierra Pine.

"It's been a moving target. Now we know what the target is."

Once the equipment is installed, the companies will reduce pollutants by 64 percent.

The companies, which were required to install the equipment on Oct. 1, have filed a one-year extension that will be considered at an coming public hearing.

The hearing will begin at 4 p.m. Nov. 29 at the Lausmann Business Center, DEQ conference room, 221 Stewart Ave., Suite 201, Medford. An information session will be held at 3 p.m.

Five other timber products companies in the state, including three in the Roseburg area, also have filed for the extension.

Conde Cox, a Jacksonville resident who has been an outspoken advocate for clean air in Jackson County, said the industries are attempting to drag this out in hopes the Bush administration will overturn the federal regulations, a contention disputed by local timber companies.

"They are doing everything they can to avoid it or delay it," said Cox.

He said the local industries have known what kind of equipment they would need, citing Boise

Cascade's Medford plant as an example of a local company that has installed new equipment as part of a lawsuit settlement.

The new federal rules differ from other clean air laws because they set guidelines for so-called "grandfathered" industries that have been allowed to pollute because they were in operation before laws took effect.

"For the first time in history, it makes these guys clean up everything," said Cox.

He predicted local residents will see and smell the difference once the pollution devices are installed.

One side benefit of the new equipment is that it requires large filters that remove small particles that can produce haze and aggravate health problems such as asthma, stroke or emphysema.

Cox said the local industries want to avoid the expense of installing this equipment.

"It is purely and strictly a selfish refusal to spend money to clean up their own waste," he said.

Contrary to what Cox asserts, Timber Products business analyst Erik Vos said compliance with federal rules is not an easy process because of the complexity of technology and regulations required to get rid of the pollutants. Also, he said, companies have to anticipate new regulations that will be imposed, particularly controls of greenhouse gases.

"It's never as simple as he (Cox) wants to believe it is," he said. "There are lots of moving parts and things to do."

Andy Ginsburg, air quality administrator for the DEQ, said each extension proposal will be judged on a case-by-case basis and will require that the company show it is making an effort to get the equipment installed.

Under federal rules, companies must install the state-of-the-art air-cleaning equipment if they produce either 10 tons of a single hazardous pollutant annually or pump out 25 tons of a combination of various pollutants. The EPA has identified 188 hazardous pollutants.

In the case of Rogue Valley Plywood, the company generated 9 tons of methanol in 2002, but has the ability to produce up to 11 tons, according to the DEQ.

Ginsburg said the DEQ would like compliance as soon as possible, but said recent court cases and other delays have prevented the companies from better preparing for the deadline.

"They can't put on the controls any faster than they can put on the controls," he said.

In eight years, the companies might have to install more pollution devices as part of the new rules, said Ginsburg.

Vos of Timber Products said the company hasn't yet issued the purchase orders for the equipment, but he anticipates it will do so in the very near future.

"We have every expectation of meeting the extension deadline," Vos said.

Some industries are using high heat to burn off the toxins, but that process produces carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

Vos said Timber Products will spend \$3 million in pollution control equipment to get rid of the hazardous pollutants.

A bio-filter will be installed for the drier and press used in the particle board plant and a catalytic oxidizer will be installed at the plywood plant. Both these technologies will require less heat, he said.

Lynch of Sierra Pine said he couldn't release information about the cost of equipment his company will be installing, but he expected to spend more than Timber Products. He said the equipment will include a catalytic oxidizer, though he is concerned about future laws that could curtail greenhouse gases and make the newly purchased equipment obsolete.

Lynch said his company knew some kind of new rules were coming and it has been looking into pollution controls for the past seven years.

Sierra Pine had planned to try to manufacture plywood using less formaldehyde in the binding process, but Lynch said that endeavor has been placed on the back burner because of the complexities of engineering and installing the new equipment. "It's a huge undertaking," he said.

Lynch said the new controls will mean less pollution, but he didn't think it would be marked.

"If all the industrial sources went away, the average person wouldn't notice the hills looking any brighter," he said.

Skyrman said that if the timber companies really were concerned about the environment the equipment would have already been installed.

"If they really were that concerned, it would have been done years ago," he said.

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## **New U.S. Environmental Protection Agency pollution rules will force three timber products companies to install millions of dollars' worth of equipment. The new equipment will clean up byproducts from the production of plywood or particle board that includ**

2002 pollutants Amount reduced by new equipment % of reduction

Sierra Pine 165 tons 118 tons 72

Timber Products 73 tons 42 tons 58

Rogue Valley Plywood 23 tons 8 tons 35

Total 261 tons 168 tons 64

Source: DEQ