



ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

40 CFR Part 52

[EPA-R09-OAR-2024-0142; FRL-11848-02-R9]

Determination To Defer Sanctions; California; Antelope Valley Air Quality Management District and Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District

AGENCY: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

ACTION: Interim final determination.

SUMMARY: The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is making an interim final determination that the California Air Resources Board (CARB) has submitted a revised rule on behalf of the Antelope Valley Air Quality Management District (AVAQMD) and Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District (MDAQMD) that corrects deficiencies identified in its Clean Air Act (CAA or Act) state implementation plan (SIP) provisions concerning rules submitted to address section 185 of the Clean Air Act (CAA or the Act) with respect to the 1-hour ozone standard. This determination is based on a proposed approval, published elsewhere in this *Federal Register*, of AVAQMD Rule 315 and MDAQMD Rule 315, which establish a section 185 fee program in the AVAQMD and MDAQMD portions of the Southeast Desert Modified Air Quality Management Area. The effect of this interim final determination is that the imposition of sanctions that were triggered by a previous disapproval by the EPA in 2022 is now deferred. If the EPA finalizes its approval of AVAQMD Rule 315 and MDAQMD Rule 315 submission, relief from these sanctions will become permanent.

DATES: This interim final determination is effective on [Insert date of publication in the *Federal Register*]. However, comments will be accepted on or before [Insert date 30 days after date of publication in the *Federal Register*].

ADDRESSES: Submit your comments, identified by Docket ID No. EPA-R09-OAR-2024-0142 at <https://www.regulations.gov>. For comments submitted at Regulations.gov, follow the online

instructions for submitting comments. Once submitted, comments cannot be edited or removed from Regulations.gov. The EPA may publish any comment received to its public docket. Do not submit electronically any information you consider to be Confidential Business Information (CBI) or other information whose disclosure is restricted by statute. Multimedia submissions (audio, video, etc.) must be accompanied by a written comment. The written comment is considered the official comment and should include discussion of all points you wish to make. The EPA will generally not consider comments or comment contents located outside of the primary submission (i.e., on the web, cloud, or other file sharing system). For additional submission methods, please contact the person identified in the **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT** section. For the full EPA public comment policy, information about CBI or multimedia submissions, and general guidance on making effective comments, please visit <https://www.epa.gov/dockets/commenting-epa-dockets>. If you need assistance in a language other than English or if you are a person with disabilities who needs a reasonable accommodation at no cost to you, please contact the person identified in the **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT** section.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Donnique Sherman, EPA Region IX, 75 Hawthorne St., San Francisco, CA 94105. By phone: (415) 947–4129 or by email at sherman.donnique@epa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Throughout this document, “we,” “us,” and “our” refer to the EPA.

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I. Background

On September 29, 2022 (87 FR 59021), the EPA issued a disapproval of AVAQMD Rule 315 and MDAQMD Rule 315 that had been submitted by CARB to the EPA on December 14, 2011. In our 2022 action, we determined that the rules were largely consistent with general CAA requirements regarding SIP submissions. However, the rules were found to have the following summarized deficiencies: no justification for the method chosen to calculate alternate baseline emissions for facilities with emissions that are irregular, cyclical, or otherwise vary significantly; the rules establish an area-wide equivalency “Tracking Account” across AVAQMD, MDAQMD, and South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) but SCAQMD did not have a rule that contained the same provisions rendering the area-wide tracking system unenforceable; the formula for calculation for the penalty fee did not properly reflect the inflation adjustment based on the Consumer Price index; and AVAQMD Rule 315 defined the term “Major Facility” as defined in “District Rule 1301” but the current SIP-approved Rule 1301 for AVAQMD did not contain a definition of “Major Facility.” Therefore, we disapproved the rules because they contained provisions that did not meet our evaluation criteria and affected rule enforceability and stringency.

Pursuant to section 179 of the CAA and our regulations at 40 CFR 52.31, the full disapproval action under title I, part D started a sanctions clock for imposition of offset sanctions 18 months after the action’s effective date of October 31, 2022, and highway sanctions 6 months later.

On May 11, 2023, CARB submitted MDAQMD Rule 315 (amended February 27, 2023) and on February 14, 2024, CARB submitted AVAQMD Rule 315 (amended November 21, 2023) to correct the deficiencies of the full disapproval and to satisfy the requirements of CAA sections 182(d)(3) and 185 by utilizing a fee equivalency approach consistent with the principles of CAA section 172(e). In the Proposed Rules section of this *Federal Register*, we have proposed approval of AVAQMD’s 2024 submittal of Rule 315 and MDAQMD’s 2023 submittal

of Rule 315. Based on this proposed approval action, we are also making this interim final determination, effective on publication, to defer imposition of the offset sanctions and highway sanctions that were triggered by our 2022 full disapproval of AVAQMD Rule 315 and MDAQMD Rule 315, because we believe that the new rule submissions correct the deficiencies that triggered such sanctions.

The EPA is providing the public with an opportunity to comment on this deferral of sanctions. If comments are submitted that change our assessment described in this interim final determination and the proposed full approval of AVAQMD Rule 315 and MDAQMD Rule 315, we would take final action to lift this deferral of sanctions under 40 CFR 52.31. If no comments are submitted that change our assessment, then all sanctions and any sanction clocks triggered by our 2022 action would be permanently terminated on the effective date of our final approval of AVAQMD Rule 315 and MDAQMD Rule 315.

II. The EPA's Evaluation and Action

We are making an interim final determination to defer CAA section 179 sanctions associated with our September 29, 2022 (87 FR 59021) disapproval of the 2011 submittal of AVAQMD Rule 315 and MDAQMD Rule 315. This determination is based on our concurrent proposal to approve the 2023 submittal of MDAQMD Rule 315 and the 2024 submittal of AVAQMD Rule 315, which resolves the deficiency that triggered sanctions under section 179 of the CAA.

Because the EPA has preliminarily determined that the 2023 submittal of MDAQMD Rule 315 and the 2024 submittal of AVAQMD Rule 315 is fully approvable, relief from sanctions should be provided as quickly as possible. Therefore, the EPA is invoking the good cause exception under the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) in not providing an opportunity for comment before this action takes effect (5 U.S.C. 553(b)(3)). However, by this action, the EPA is providing the public with a chance to comment on the EPA's determination after the

effective date, and the EPA will consider any comments received in determining whether to reverse such action.

The EPA believes that notice-and-comment rulemaking before the effective date of this action is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. The EPA has reviewed the State's submittals and, through its proposed action, is indicating that it is more likely than not that the State has submitted a revision to the SIP that corrects deficiencies under part D of the Act that were the basis for the action that started the sanctions clocks. Therefore, it is not in the public interest to impose sanctions. The EPA believes that it is necessary to use the interim final rulemaking process to defer sanctions while the EPA completes its rulemaking process on the approvability of the State's submittal. Moreover, with respect to the effective date of this action, the EPA is invoking the good cause exception to the 30-day notice requirement of the APA because the purpose of this notice is to relieve a restriction (5 U.S.C. 553(d)(1)).

III. Statutory and Executive Order Reviews

This action defers sanctions and imposes no additional requirements. For that reason, this action:

- Is not a “significant regulatory action” subject to review by the Office of Management and Budget under Executive Orders 12866 (58 FR 51735, October 4, 1993) and 13563 (76 FR 3821, January 21, 2011);
- Does not impose an information collection burden under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act (44 U.S.C. 3501 *et seq.*);
- Is certified as not having a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities under the Regulatory Flexibility Act (5 U.S.C. 601 *et seq.*);
- Does not contain any unfunded mandate or significantly or uniquely affect small governments, as described in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995 (Pub. L. 104-4);

- Does not have federalism implications as specified in Executive Order 13132 (64 FR 43255, August 10, 1999);
- Is not an economically significant regulatory action based on health or safety risks subject to Executive Order 13045 (62 FR 19885, April 23, 1997);
- Is not a significant regulatory action subject to Executive Order 13211 (66 FR 28355, May 22, 2001);
- Is not subject to requirements of Section 12(d) of the National Technology Transfer and Advancement Act of 1995 (15 U.S.C. 272 note) because application of those requirements would be inconsistent with the Clean Air Act; and
- Does not provide the EPA with the discretionary authority to address disproportionate human health or environmental effects with practical, appropriate, and legally permissible methods under Executive Order 12898 (59 FR 7629, February 16, 1994).
- Is not approved to apply on any Indian reservation land or in any other area where the EPA or an Indian tribe has demonstrated that a tribe has jurisdiction. In those areas of Indian country, the rule does not have tribal implications and will not impose substantial direct costs on tribal governments or preempt tribal law as specified by Executive Order 13175 (65 FR 67249, November 9, 2000).
- Is subject to the Congressional Review Act (CRA), 5 U.S.C. 801 *et seq.*, and the EPA will submit a rule report to each House of the Congress and to the Comptroller General of the United States. The CRA allows the issuing agency to make a rule effective sooner than otherwise provided by the CRA if the agency makes a good cause finding that notice and comment rulemaking procedures are impracticable, unnecessary or contrary to the public interest (5 U.S.C. 808(2)). The EPA has made a good cause finding for this rule as discussed in section II of this preamble, including the basis for that finding.

Under section 307(b)(1) of the CAA, petitions for judicial review of this action must be filed in the United States Court of Appeals for the appropriate circuit by [**Insert date 60 days after date of publication in the *Federal Register***]. Filing a petition for reconsideration by the EPA Administrator of this final rule does not affect the finality of this rule for the purpose of judicial review nor does it extend the time within which petition for judicial review may be filed, and shall not postpone the effectiveness of such rule or action. This action may not be challenged later in proceedings to enforce its requirements (see CAA section 307(b)(2)).

List of Subjects in 40 CFR Part 52

Environmental protection, Air pollution control, Incorporation by reference, Intergovernmental relations, Oxides of nitrogen, Ozone, Volatile Organic Compounds, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements.

Authority: 42 U.S.C. 7401 *et seq.*

Dated: **April 16, 2024.**
Martha Guzman Aceves,
Regional Administrator, Region IX.