

Clean-air action needed at ports

Article Launched: 08/13/2007 07:08:19 PM PDT

THE federal government is last aboard in cleaning up the twin ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles, but it's not too late.

A ban on bunker fuel would help.

Bunker fuel is the pollutant-heavy gunk whose only saving grace is that it's cheap.

A law banning it has been endorsed by almost everyone but certain cost-conscious shipping companies.

Actually, the Southern Cali-

ifornia ports are fairly well along in forcing shippers to switch from bunker fuel to more expensive but much less damaging low-sulfur fuel.

As terminal leases come up for renewal, they include that and several other clean-air measures, including dockside electricity to replace the ships' diesel generators.

If such facts make your eyes glaze over, here's one that will hit where it hurts. Ships dump

30 tons a day of sulfur compounds into the air you breathe. That's more than all the trucks, cars, buses and refineries put together.

Here's exactly why you should care: The sulfur compounds, when mixed with oxygen and moisture (as in your lungs, for example) form sulfuric acid.

Your lungs don't deserve an acid bath. Remember, pollution from the ports blow into our neck of the woods by way of prevailing winds.

The only logical argument against a federal ban on high-

sulfur diesel fuel is that such regulations should be international, not local or national. Logical, but wrong on every other count.

The real reason to wait for international action is to put off paying for it. Our lungs can't afford that.

The proposed law, S1499 by Sen. Barbara Boxer, would reduce sulfur content from 27,000 parts per million to

1,000 parts per million. Cars

and trucks already are limited to

15 parts per million. Congress should pass this bill and the

president sign it without delay.

Shippers don't have to wait, of course, and many have switched to low-sulfur fuel on their own, including Maersk, APL and BP. About

85 percent are complying with requests (along with rent-rebate

incentives) to reduce speed when nearing shore, which also reduces the output of sulfur oxides and other harmful emissions.

Los Angeles county mayors spoke at a hearing in San Pedro last week about the need for federal help in cleaning up emissions from the Long Beach-L.A. ports. Some couldn't resist finger-pointing, with plenty of justification.

But it would be better to make the case for cooperation among shippers, ports and government officials at all levels.

Still, if the feds or any others persist in being late to help with the cleanup, local officials know what they should do.

Proceed, dead ahead, without them.

Close Window

Send To Printer