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California Identifies Second-Hand Smoke as a “Toxic Air Contaminant”

SACRAMENTO: Today the California Air Resources Board (ARB) identified environmental tobacco smoke (ETS), or second-hand smoke, as a Toxic Air Contaminant (TAC). ETS is now formally identified as an airborne toxic substance that may cause and/or contribute to death or serious illness. ARB’s action to list ETS as a TAC was based on a comprehensive report on exposure and health effects of ETS.

“This new report reaffirms many of the adverse health effects associated with ETS, especially in children who live in homes where smoking occurs,” said ARB Chairman, Dr. Robert Sawyer. “It also raises new concerns about its effects on women. All this strongly supported the need for the Air Board to identify ETS as a serious health threat.”

Second-hand smoke is a complex mixture of compounds produced by burning of tobacco products. ETS is also a source of other toxic air contaminants such as benzene, 1,3 butadiene, and arsenic. In California each year, tobacco smoke is responsible for the release into the environment of 40 tons of nicotine, 365 tons of respirable particulate matter, and 1900 tons of carbon monoxide.

As required by State law, the ARB evaluated exposures to ETS, while the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) assessed the health effects from these exposures. The OEHHA evaluation clearly established links between exposure to ETS and a number of adverse health effects, including some specific to children and infants. These include premature births, low birth-weight babies, and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Other effects of ETS on children include the induction and exacerbation of asthma, and infections of the middle-ear and respiratory system.

The OEHHA evaluation also found links between ETS exposure and increased incidences of breast cancer in non-smoking, pre-menopausal women. ETS had already been linked to adult incidences of lung and nasal sinus cancer, heart disease, eye and nasal irritation, and asthma.

“The ARB’s action rightfully puts second-hand tobacco smoke in the same category as the most toxic automotive and industrial air pollutants,” OEHHA Director Joan Denton said. “Californians, especially parents, would not willingly fill their homes with motor vehicle exhaust, and they should feel the same way about tobacco smoke.”

Now that ETS is identified as a toxic air contaminant, the ARB must evaluate the need for action to reduce exposures. In this risk management step, ARB conducts an analysis that includes a review of measures already in place, available options and the costs for reducing the health risks from ETS exposure. The analysis is conducted using an open public process.

More information is available on ARB’s ETS website.

The Air Resources Board is a department of the California Environmental Protection Agency. ARB’s mission is to promote and protect public health, welfare, and ecological resources through effective reduction of air pollutants while recognizing and considering effects on the economy. The ARB oversees all air pollution control efforts in California to attain and maintain health based air quality standards.

The energy challenge facing California is real. Every Californian needs to take immediate action to reduce energy consumption. For a list of simple ways you can reduce demand and cut your energy cost, see our website at <http://www.arb.ca.gov>