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VIEWPOINTS

Should EPA have approved smog plan?

No, federal agency has given up on getting clean air in North Texas, says **Al Armendariz**

The next time you fly in to any airport in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, look out the window and you are likely to see the brown cloud of pollution that lingers over our cities. You may wonder if breathing that air is harmful, especially for children, or whether there is anything anyone can do to clean it up.

The answer is yes. Yet, unfortunately, that cloud is going to be with us for a long, long time.

Our area has been violating the public health smog standards since measurements began in the early 1970s. This week, the Environmental Protection Agency approved our state's plan for eliminating ozone smog in North Texas, a plan that undoubtedly will join the ranks of all the area's other failed smog blueprints.

Texas has allowed big utilities and industry to operate any way they want to for decades. The state also has massively under-funded transit projects, so working people often have no choice but to drive long distances to and from work. The mercury in our tuna, the melting of the ice caps and the smog in our skies are all symptoms of the unwillingness of Texas and other state governments to take the common-sense steps needed to eliminate emissions.

Cleaning the air is not impossible. From 2004 to 2006, a local committee of elected officials, business leaders and environmentalists met numerous times and adopted recommendations for the state to help clean our air.

These included practical ideas such as adopting the California emission standards for vehicles in

Texas so that our cars would be as clean as any in the country and holding power plants in rural areas of Texas to the same emission standards that power plants in urban areas have to meet. Also proposed was testing emissions-reductions technology on the cement kilns south of Dallas, which are the largest industrial emitters in North Texas.

None of these proposals are in the plan the federal government just approved. The state ignored these local recommendations and instead crafted a clean-air plan that is weak and doomed to fail.

Congress wisely gave EPA the authority to supervise state clean-air efforts and, when necessary, to step in and write clean-air plans if states don't get them right.

Unfortunately, our EPA, like the rest of the federal government, is badly broken. This is the same government that has been unable to keep lead-painted toys and E. coli-contaminated food out of our stores and ensure that prescription drugs are safe and effective.

As this North Texas air plan decision demonstrates, we can add EPA to the list of federal agencies that are failing us and need to be reformed.



Dr. Al Armendariz is an assistant professor in the School of Engineering at Southern Methodist University and a member of the Texas advisory board of the Environmental Defense Fund. His e-mail address is aja@enr.smu.edu.

Yes, we significantly raised the area's environmental standards, says the EPA's **Richard Greene**

One year ago, in compliance with federal requirements, the Environmental Protection Agency received a plan from the Texas environmental agency that described what would be done to provide the people of the Dallas-Fort Worth region cleaner air to breathe.

Upon review of the plan, we concluded that more needed to be done to reduce air pollution if the proposal was to get our endorsement.

Together with state officials, we fully engaged the area's mayors, county judges, business leaders and environmentalists in discussions about ways to make the plan stronger.

We've spent the past 12 months working in a collaboration never before assembled to make this a healthier community, and earlier this week we announced the successful outcome of those efforts.

The plan we have now proposed for approval is significantly stronger — it requires the reduction of 88 tons per day of harmful emissions instead of the 48 tons first proposed.

Further, it meets the test of requiring the most stringent controls in the country on the operations of the principal industrial sources of air pollution in the area.

The collective opinion of environmental scientists working for the public interest at the state and federal levels of gov-

ernment is that the plan will result in compliance with current air-quality standards.

Some believe the better course would be for the EPA to simply reject the plan and require a new one to be developed.

But this would mean putting off for several more years the kinds of hazardous emission controls that are vital to better air quality.

The problem with doing so is

that such action will not result in a faster route to cleaner air for the people of North Texas — nor would it likely result in greater pollution reductions.

In spite of extraordinary growth in the area's population and

economic expansion, our air quality is improving. We want to accelerate that trend and keep it going.

We have invited public comment on our proposal. We are interested in what anyone has to offer in ways to further strengthen the plan.

We are also interested in any suggestions of a strategy that results in healthier air faster than the one now proposed.



Richard Greene is the regional administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency and may be reached through www.epa.gov/region6. A copy of the air proposal and directions for public comments are also available on the site.



READ this newspaper's editorial on the EPA decision. dallasnews.com/opinion