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National Organization Approves Resolution Submitted by Supervisor Carbajal To Fight Air Pollution Emitted by Ocean-going Vessels

The National Association of Counties (NACo) last week unanimously adopted a resolution sponsored by Santa Barbara County First District Supervisor Salud Carbajal to improve air quality and reduce air pollution emissions from ocean-going vessels traveling offshore, including the county's coastline. The resolution was adopted July 28 at the NACo national conference.

As a result, NACo will now advocate that the U.S. Congress introduce legislation based on the nationally adopted resolution presented by Supervisor Carbajal that would direct the federal government to pursue a variety of strategies to control this type of air pollution. In addition, NACo will begin working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to adopt and enforce regulations on marine vessels as part of the federal Clean Air Act.

"Ocean-going ships are a major source of uncontrolled toxic emissions that contribute to both local air pollution and worldwide greenhouse gases, including nitrogen oxides, diesel particulate matter, sulfur and other airborne toxics," Supervisor Carbajal said. "These emissions represent a serious threat to our air quality and public health and must be stopped."

Additionally, the resolution requests that the federal government work with the International Maritime Organization to designate portions of coastal waters as "Emission Control Areas." Such a designation would require stringent new standards to control harmful exhaust emissions from the engines that power these ships.

Ocean-going vessel engines tend to burn the dirtiest fuel available and have been largely unregulated in the past. The ships are a major source of air pollution worldwide. Coastal regions are affected when emissions from these ships blow inland. In addition, the ships' emissions are a significant source of toxic air pollution exposure in urban areas near ports.

In Santa Barbara County, ships traveling the Santa Barbara Channel currently produce about 50 percent of the nitrogen oxide (NOx, a smog-forming pollutant) emitted in the county. In 2005, marine vessels made 7,086 trips along the 130 miles of coastline of Santa Barbara, producing nearly 15,000 tons of nitrogen oxide. If left uncontrolled, these ships may contribute up to 75 percent of the county's NOx pollution by the year 2020, according to the County Air Pollution Control District.

In addition to working on the national level, Supervisor Carbajal helped lead the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors to include the issue of emissions from marine vessels as part of its adopted 2009 legislative platform.

At the NACo meeting held during the week of July 27, Carbajal also became the elected Chair of the Air Quality Subcommittee for NACo's Energy, Environment and Land Use Committee. NACo is the national organization that represents county governments in the United States. Founded in 1935, NACo helps advance issues for counties on a national level with a unified voice before the U.S. government.

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