

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BARBARA BOXER
FIELD BRIEFING ON
“AIR POLLUTION CHALLENGES FOR CALIFORNIA’S INLAND EMPIRE”
(Remarks as prepared for delivery)

I want to welcome everyone to today’s hearing about a critically important issue for this region – the Inland Empire’s air pollution problems, and what is being done about them.

According to the American Lung Association, San Bernardino and Riverside Counties were the most polluted counties in the nation for particulate matter (also called fine soot) in 2005. While some important steps are being taken to address this problem, and many people are working hard to address the issue, the air quality challenges remain serious in the Inland Empire.

We will hear testimony about the causes and extent of this pollution, as well as the very real effects that this pollution is having on children and families. We also will hear about what’s being done about it.

The good news is that we have some of the leading experts working right here on ways to solve air pollution problems.

As we will hear in a few moments, the South Coast Air Quality Management District and the California Air Resources Board recently announced important new plans to move us towards improved air quality in this area.

The past 30 years have shown us that our communities can enjoy sustained economic growth while at the same time cleaning up the air.

Even with strong continuing growth, there has been a great deal of progress in cleaning up the air in this area—for example, the number of the most serious bad air days has substantially dropped over the past three decades.

But the air still is unacceptably polluted in the Inland Empire much of the year, and I think that virtually everyone agrees that more needs to be done.

Our communities must be protected from air pollution and other problems, even as our economy grows to accommodate more trade.

Children in the Inland Empire should not be forced to breathe air that hurts their lungs or puts their health at risk.

Like you, I am especially concerned about the effects of air pollution on the health of those who are most vulnerable: our children, our elderly, and people with asthma or other diseases.

I have here a filter taken from an air monitor not far from where we are meeting today, near a school here in the Inland Empire. When the filter went in, it was pure white. Twenty-four hours later, it was totally black. Our kids are breathing this.

I know we all agree that we are doing a lot to make this better. But I think we could also agree that we can and must do more.

That is why we are meeting here today for this important hearing on what is causing the air pollution in this area, what it is doing to the community's health, and what's being done about it.

I am very pleased that we will be hearing from state and local officials who are spearheading efforts to clean up our air, as well as from a special witness who has a personal story to tell, and from doctors and other experts who can help us understand this problem.

We will hear today from a very distinguished group of witnesses:

Panel I:

- Ms. Lynn Terry, Deputy Executive Officer for Planning, Calif. Air Resources Board
- Mr. Gary Ovitt, Supervisor, San Bernardino County; Board Member, South Coast Air Quality Management Dist.; President, Southern California Association of Governments

Panel II:

- Jonah Ramirez (age 11), “Clean Air Ambassador” for Children with Respiratory Disease
- Penny Newman, Executive Director, Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice
- Adriano Martinez, Project Attorney, Natural Resources Defense Council
- Dr. Jim Gauderman, Professor, Keck Medical School, University of Southern California
- Dr. Joe Corless, Chief, Pediatric Allergy Section, Arrowhead Regional Medical Center

I want to take this opportunity to recognize the tremendous contribution of local citizens groups, who have been instrumental in spurring much-needed action to reduce local air pollution. Their continued involvement is critical to ensuring effective pollution control programs.

I also want to recognize the many people in the goods movement business and in other local businesses and industries in this area who acknowledge that we need to do more to deal with our air pollution problems.

Good people in these industries, including the trucking and rail industries, have expressed a willingness to work with us to clean up our air.

This Field Briefing is part of a series of ongoing briefings, meetings, hearings, and informal discussions my colleagues and I are having to get to the bottom of this problem, and to work together to find solutions. It will require a spirit of cooperation and mutual understanding to solve this problem. We must - and we will -engage all stakeholders in addressing this chronic problem.

We all recognize that goods movement is a powerful economic engine for their region, our state, and the nation as a whole. It spurs business development and creates jobs.

Our own Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach illustrate that point. Together they handle nearly 45% of the containerized cargo imported into the United States, and they help sustain the economic vitality of the region.

But ports and associated goods movement are also significant sources of pollution as ships come and go, harbor equipment loads and unloads cargo, and trucks and trains move the cargo to and from the docks.

In Southern California, smog and soot pollution that are responsible for 5,400 premature deaths, 2,400 hospitalizations, 140,000 incidences of asthma and respiratory problems, and nearly one million lost work days each year.

The diesel engines also emit toxic air pollutants that can cause cancer and other life-threatening diseases.

And these harmful effects are often disproportionately felt by low income families.

I believe that every child deserves a healthy start, a chance for their lungs and respiratory system to fully develop and provide them with the capacity and capability to breathe.

We will hear this morning about studies showing that children growing up in polluted communities in the Inland Empire have slower-growing lungs, and that after years of losing lung growth each year, children in more polluted communities have higher rates of medically-significant low lung function.

These kids have a reduced ability to move air through their respiratory system – just because of the quality of the outdoor air they breathe.

Children with asthma have more symptoms and respiratory problems in more polluted communities. This is important because low lung function makes people more vulnerable to respiratory disease later in life, and even to early death.

The documented effects of air pollution on humans are not limited to children. In adults, long-term exposure to air pollutants also can cause heart and lung problems and can even hasten death.

But we are beginning to see signs of progress recently in reducing pollution here.

The California Air Resources Board and the South Coast Air Quality Management District have made vital contributions to air pollution clean-up by establishing aggressive controls on various sources of some sources of air pollution.

The federal government has also begun to address some of the sources of air emissions.

But much more progress is needed. Shipping is expected to double and even triple in the next two decades as the result of global trade agreements. This will mean a lot more ships, trains, and trucks moving goods.

And more shipping will inevitably bring more pollution unless additional action is taken now.

There is a significant source of pollution that has so far largely escaped adequate regulation: large, oceangoing vessels such as container ships, bulk carriers, and tankers.

They are the fastest growing, least regulated sources of air pollution in the U.S. today. And some of the pollution from these ships drifts from the ports right here to the Inland Empire, mixing with pollution from an array of other sources.

In Southern California, ocean-going vessels are already the largest contributor to the region's soot-forming emissions of sulfur oxides. By 2023 they are expected to be the largest contributor to the region's smog-forming emissions of nitrogen oxides.

The federal government should regulate these ships. Most oceangoing vessels are foreign-owned, and these foreign ships emit almost 90% of the vessel pollution in the U.S.

That's why Senator Feinstein and I introduced the Marine Vessel Emission Reduction Act, S. 1499, to require oceangoing vessels visiting U.S. ports to use cleaner fuel and cleaner engines.

Reducing ship emissions on the bill's schedule would make a much-needed contribution to this region's efforts to meet federal soot and smog standards on time.

But I know we must do more. We must work hard together to do everything we can to make progress on clearing our air, and to address all major pollution sources.

Clean air is not a luxury. While some of us may buy designer water in bottles, and may even buy specially-grown foods and special consumer products containing fewer toxins, none of us can choose not to breathe.

I envision a day when every child in the Inland Empire—and indeed every child in this beautiful nation—will be able to take a breath any time, day or night, winter or summer, at school, on the playground, or in their back yard, and enjoy the simple pleasure of deeply inhaling fresh, clean, and healthy air.

This is, in my view, every child's God-given right. We must all work together to make this vision happen.