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TOP STORY

Regional pollution workshop Saturday

BENNETT HALL Corvallis Gazette-Times Oct 3, 2017 Updated 9 hrs ago



Steam and particulates rise from the stacks at the Hollingsworth & Vose factory in south Corvallis in this file photo from October 2016. The company is seeking a new air pollution permit after state regulators discovered they had allowed it to operate under the wrong one for nearly two decades.

Anibal Ortiz, Gazette-Times file photo

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A community workshop in Corvallis this weekend will provide information on new industrial air pollution rules being proposed for Oregon.

The free event will take place from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. on Saturday at the Corvallis-Benton County Public Library, 645 NW Monroe Ave. Participants can register online at <http://conta.cc/2xZeEAo>.

It's one of three regional workshops being held around the state, following similar sessions this week in Portland and The Dalles. Participating organizations include the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Oregon Health Authority, Department of Environmental Quality, Clean Corvallis Air and Beyond Toxics, a Eugene-based group.

The proposed rules are being drafted by DEQ and OHA staff based on a framework developed by Cleaner Air Oregon, an initiative launched by Gov. Kate Brown in early 2016 following the public uproar over toxic emissions from art glass plants in the Portland area.

Here in the mid-valley, residents have raised concerns about emissions from the Hollingsworth & Vose glass fiber plant in Corvallis, the Entek battery separator producer in Lebanon and the J.H. Baxter wood preservatives factory in Eugene.

Area residents will have a chance to weigh in on the new rules by testifying during an upcoming public comment period, but Clean Corvallis Air founder Marilyn Koenitzer said people first need to inform themselves about the proposal's details.

“It’s a very complex subject,” she said. “We just want people to know the overall scope of the rules.”

Anyone with concerns about industrial air emissions should come to the Corvallis workshop on Saturday, added Lisa Arkin of Beyond Toxics.

“It’s important for people to be at this meeting because the public can really shape the direction Oregon can take to overhaul its air pollution regulations,” she said.

“If the public doesn’t have a voice, doesn’t show up and make its voice heard, then industry will have the greatest voice in shaping these rules.”

Unlike current state air pollution regulations, the new rules are supposed to specifically address risks to human health by keeping emissions within safe exposure levels.

California and Washington have already adopted health-based air pollution regulations, but some activists are worried that the proposed Oregon rules are being watered down to accommodate industry concerns.

Arkin, who sits on the Cleaner Air Oregon Policy Advisory Committee, said the panel has only seen “bits and pieces” of the proposed rules so far but added that “there are some concerning areas.” Among them proposals that would:

- Waive regulations for operations that emit pollutants below a certain volume.

- Allow polluters that employ fewer than 50 people to ask for economic hardship waivers.
- Let factories of any size appeal to the head of the DEQ for a “director’s decision” on emission limits without public input.

“We expected more,” added Koenitzer, who has been monitoring Cleaner Air Oregon meetings for the local chapter of the League of Women Voters. “The governor promised (health-based rules), and they were going along that way until the summer.”

Cleaner Air Oregon will submit a final draft of the proposed regulations next month to the state Environmental Quality Commission, which is scheduled to vote on the rules in December.

The DEQ will schedule a series of public hearings around the state next month.

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