Ozone cure linked to auto rules

By MIKE DUNNE
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Any solution to Baton Rouge's ozone problems will have to rely heavily on stricter emissions standards on automobiles, an expert with the Ozone Advisory Board said Monday.

The idea that industry can clean up its emissions and solve the problem is an oversimplification, said Bill Slaughter, a facilitator for the board. "Seeing them as the only source of the problem is wrong," he said.

"At some point in the future we are going to have to have some emission requirements," Slaughter said in a talk to the Baton Rouge Press Club.

If there are no curbs on auto emissions, it is unlikely Baton Rouge will be able to meet ozone guidelines by 1993, when economic sanctions may be imposed on Baton Rouge and the state. Ozone is a standard of air quality, and high levels of it are associated with increased health risks, especially those with respiratory diseases. Ozone levels climb under conditions in which there is a combination of hydrocarbons, oxides of nitrogen, sunlight and stagnant air.

Typically, the Baton Rouge area has exceeded U.S. Environmental Protection Agency limits 10-15 days per year. During 1989, the ozonelimit was exceeded on 13 days. "As long as we are not in compliance we can continue to look forward to restrictions in economic development," said Slaughter, a management expert.

No new industries that would emit more than 100 tons of hydrocarbons are able to locate here. That impacts jobs and revenues in the area, Slaughter said.

If the area is unable to comply with the 1993 deadline for compliance, highway funds and grants for the Department of Environmental Quality may be jeopardized, Slaughter said.

"We all have a vested interest to have" the ozone problem corrected, he said.

DEQ must submit a plan for meeting the 1993 deadline later this year. In an effort to facilitate that plan, the task force has been monitoring air at 12 locations throughout the area and using that data to create an "airshed" model.

"By mid-spring we should have some definitive data from which we can draw conclusions on where the hydrocarbons and oxides of nitrogen are coming from," Slaughter said. Once done, my expectations are we can begin to identify specific actions.

Once the air models tell experts what is forming ozone, a plan of action can be
devised, Slaughter said. The ability to forecast should be improved with the model and preventative actions can be ordered, he said.

“There’s a lot more known about ozone than in anytime in our history. There’s a lot more to be known,” Slaughter said.

Industries have reduced their hydrocarbon emissions by 80 percent in the past 15 years, but the problem continues, Slaughter said. That means other sources have to be reviewed. Automobile emissions are the major area in which reductions can be made.

Traffic levels and patterns plus the number of cars more than 10 years old are significantly contributing to the problem, Slaughter said. Emission standards similar to California’s may be considered for Louisiana.

“The ultimate cost is going to be shared ... not only by industry but also John Q. Public,” Slaughter said.