

Industries Mass for Clean Air Debate . . .

"Anybody who combusts is touched," environmentalist Rafe Pomerance has said of the Clean Air Act. His five words neatly explain why industrial America is massing to lobby for changes when the act comes up for reauthorization this year.

Coal, oil, automobiles, chemicals, paper, utilities, steel and mining: Companies and their trade associations have thrown bountiful resources into the conflict. Some of them have been doing homework on the law for as long as two years. Now their pulses have been quickened by the scent of a government more sympathetic to business.

The result has been volume upon volume of industry-sponsored research and analysis, claiming that regulations issued under the clean air law have delayed new industrial construction and inflated the costs of doing business.

Because such a bureaucracy of lobbyists, task forces, and coalitions has grown up in anticipation of the clean air debate, one of the first problems for lawmakers will be determining who speaks for whom.

The nagging worry of some industry lobbyists (and the hope of environmentalists) is that Congress may be bewildered and ultimately angered by industry's inability to agree on what would constitute reasonable amendments.

"The Clean Air Act has remarkable potential for finding everybody all over the lot . . . for cutting up, separating and dividing people who would normally be allied," said a lobbyist for one energy conglomerate.

Recalling how a split within the chemical industry helped produce toxic wastes cleanup legislation last year, Kenneth Kamlet, a lawyer for National Wildlife Federation, said, "I expect that will operate to our advantage in this case, just as it did then. . . . Hopefully, industry can be counted on to tick the Congress off." (*Toxic wastes, 1980 Weekly Report p. 3509*)

Soft Sell

Industry lobbyists have made several efforts to sort their views into compatible, salable categories.

One attempt, which has received wide attention for its unusual emphasis on "the soft sell," is the Clean Air Act Project sponsored by the National Environmental Development Association. Initiated in March 1979, the project is chaired by John Quarles, a former deputy administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency and now a Washington lawyer who represents corporations with environmental concerns.

It is financed by about 35 companies, primarily in oil, chemicals, coal and wood products, plus the building trades unions of the AFL-CIO. (Because unions find trade association executives hard to get along with, industry membership in the project has been confined to executives of individual companies.)

Quarles counsels industry that hard-liners, "the antis" as he calls them, hurt the business cause by taking extreme positions that scare off allies and damage credibility. He urges participating businesses to "avoid the high rhetoric" and to start by endorsing the "major outlines" of the existing law, such as government review of

new facilities before construction, requirements for the best available technology to clean up pollution and standards to protect visibility in pristine areas.

In a widely circulated "issues workbook," the Clean Air Act Project outlined aspects of the law it claims create delays in new plant construction without significant environmental benefit. The report focuses on the rules forbidding significant deterioration of healthy air, the slow pace of granting new plant permits, questions about the quality of the scientific work used in setting the regulations and other business-wide complaints.

The group deliberately has avoided dealing with problems specific to any one industry, leaving that to individual trade associations. And though the group urges restraint, it will not challenge other industry lobbyists who demand more drastic changes and make more dire claims.

"We're not going to be in the business of agreeing with or denouncing another group's proposals," said Jeff Connally, the project officer.

Quarles has made overtures to environmentalists and other defenders of the act, but they see harsh amendments lurking in his soft language.

"Some of the proposals they're talking about I don't regard as moderate," said Richard E. Ayres of the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC).

"To some extent one might consider [Quarles' group] more dangerous from a political point of view than the groups that are more outrageous in their public statements," added Sierra Club lobbyist Blake Early.

Industry Forum

In January most of the trade associations interested in clean air law, along with a number of individual corporations, held the first meeting of a newer organization they call the Clean Air Act Forum.

Unlike Quarles' group, the forum will not try to reach collective recommendations, nor will it lobby. "It will essentially provide the hall for the industry players" to discuss the bill, debate possible amendments and coordinate their independent lobbying activities, said one participant. The coordinator is David L. Cantor, a lobbyist for the Edison Electric Institute.

Other business-wide activities include the air quality project sponsored by the Business Roundtable, which in November published a \$400,000-plus, four-volume critique of the current law prepared under contract by scientists at Harvard University and three research firms. The authors advocated much deeper changes than Quarles has supported, including a weakening of the basic health standard.

Each industry's umbrella group also is compiling and packaging information to back claims that complying with the clean air law has been a costly nuisance.

The Motor Vehicle Manufacturers Association, for example, will take the lead in lobbying for the major automakers, who insist the standards for automobile exhaust are hurting a weak but critical industry. The association probably will have valuable lobbying help from the 21,000-member National Automobile Dealers and possi-

MonMemo 3/9/81

THKP 0009450