

SENATE THIRD READING
SB 58 (Padilla)
As Amended August 13, 2026
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Requires the Air Resources Board (ARB) to develop a response framework to address fugitive and natural sources of hydrogen sulfide (H₂S).

Major Provisions

- 1) Requires ARB, in consultation with local air districts, the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA), the Office of Emergency Services, the State Department of Public Health, regional water quality control boards or other local or regional authorities, local environmental and public health agencies, universities and academic institutions, affected tribal governments, and community-based organizations, to develop a response framework that establishes best practices and guidance for addressing fugitive and natural sources of H₂S gas and for community preparation and response to H₂S exposure events originating from these sources.
- 2) Requires the response framework to:
 - a) Consider cross-media releases.
 - b) Develop integrated, multiagency approaches to identify and address fugitive and natural sources.
 - c) Develop methods for reducing identified fugitive and natural sources of H₂S gas in impacted communities.
 - d) Consider threshold levels and corresponding actions, and evaluate the need for additional threshold levels, averaging durations, and corresponding actions for subchronic or short-term exposures.
 - e) Develop best practices for measuring H₂S levels in air and using monitoring data.
 - f) Consider the influence of local and regional climates, and outdoor and indoor settings, on exposure.
 - g) Consider how responses may differ for shorter term incidents compared to conditions that may be expected to persist for longer periods.
 - h) Include an estimate of resources needed for its implementation by local and state agencies.
- 3) Requires OEHHA to update reference exposure levels, and develop additional health guidance values, for H₂S if the need is identified by ARB, in consultation with OEHHA, during the development of the response framework.
- 4) Requires ARB to conduct at least three public workshops located in the following:

- a) At least one in the Tijuana River Valley region.
- b) At least one in the Salton Sea region.
- c) At least one selected in consultation with a community that has experienced significant H₂S exposure.

COMMENTS

Hydrogen sulfide is a colorless, flammable, poisonous gas with a rotten egg odor. It burns in air with a pale blue flame. Hydrogen sulfide is emitted during the burning of sulfur-containing fuel oil and coal and wherever organic matter undergoes putrefaction. It is also emitted from a variety of industrial sources, including paper plants, leather tanning, production of heavy water for nuclear reactors, and manufacture of chemicals and metals. The primary stationary sources that have reported emissions of hydrogen sulfide in California are electrical service companies, oil and gas extraction operations, and steam and air conditioning supply services. Hydrogen sulfide also occurs in coal pits, volcanic gases, natural gas wells, sulfur springs, and in decaying organic matter containing sulfur. Hydrogen sulfide is known to cause negative respiratory and neurological impacts at the acute exposure level, and while epidemiological information for chronic effects is limited, some studies suggest chronic exposure levels may be associated with ocular, cardiovascular, respiratory, and neurological impacts. Hydrogen sulfide is regulated as a nuisance based on odor detection, with an air quality standard of 30 parts per billion (ppb) averaged over one hour. OEHHA adopted this standard as the acute reference exposure level and established a chronic inhalation reference exposure level of 8 ppb (prolonged exposure greater than one year).

Unlike the emissions from entities that ARB and local air districts regulate, there have been incidents of air emissions across the state that do not have a clear responsible party, but may far exceed established standards and have significant impacts on neighboring communities. The two situations highlighted by this bill are examples of these "orphan incidents."

Near the California-Mexico border, raw sewage from Tijuana crosses into San Diego County polluting the Tijuana River Valley with industrial chemicals, pesticides, and trash. As this transboundary pollution meanders through the valley, it generates hydrogen sulfide emissions and local scientists and communities have raised alarms about a particular emission site on Saturn Blvd, infamously known as the "hot spot." A constricted culvert under Saturn Blvd accelerates the untreated wastewater, generating turbulence and emitting hydrogen sulfide. When the wastewater is not diverted in Mexico, hydrogen sulfide has been detected at 2100 ppb (1-hour average), which is 70 times the nuisance standard, and frequently spikes depending on the flow rate of the sewage. Local scientists have demonstrated that averaging the hydrogen sulfide data over 1 hour to compare to the 30 ppb standard does not capture exceedances that occur within minutes and are suspected to have negative public health implications. The community has called for standards that consider different averaging times to capture these spikes and subsequent public notice and response.

Located in Riverside and Imperial counties, the Salton Sea tends to be a major source of hydrogen sulfide emissions due to a large influx of nutrients through agricultural runoff and the declining water levels, which increase the sea's ability to mix. With summer conditions, monitoring efforts have shown that hydrogen sulfide frequently exceeds the 30 ppb standard, for hundreds of hours over the course of the season. The humid climate of the region anecdotally

exacerbates health effects and the current standard does not take humidity into account. These emissions impact communities already overburdened and suffering respiratory impacts from other emissions originating from the progressively declining Salton Sea, such as aerosolized seawater containing toxins and particulate matter released from the exposed seabed.

According to the Author

SB 58 advances equity by improving the state's understanding of hydrogen sulfide exposure in disproportionately burdened communities, including the Tijuana River Valley and Salton Sea regions. These communities, often low-income, immigrant, Latino, and Tribal, experience repeated or prolonged exposure alongside other environmental and health stressors.

SB 58 requires a more comprehensive evaluation of hydrogen sulfide exposure, including acute and chronic impacts and vulnerable populations, to improve identification of gaps and inform state responses. It seeks to strengthen understanding of community-level health risks and improve coordination among agencies responding to hydrogen sulfide events in the Tijuana River Valley and Salton Sea.

The bill seeks to improve the state's capacity to address environmental health disparities affecting vulnerable communities.

Arguments in Support

According to the County of San Diego, SB 58's intent to update hydrogen sulfide standards and develop health-based thresholds is critical to closing a decades-long regulatory gap and protecting vulnerable populations.

Arguments in Opposition

None received for current version.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

- 1) ARB estimates costs of \$1.8 million in fiscal year (FY) 2027-28 for about six new positions, contract dollars, and equipment, followed by ongoing annual costs of \$1.3 million in FY 2028-29 and ongoing (Air Pollution Control Fund).

Specifically, ARB expects to serve as a subject matter expert on H₂S emission sources, health effects from ambient exposures, cross-media releases, exposure mitigation strategies, health-based Reference Exposure Levels (RELs), and health- and nuisance-based standards; draft the required framework and manage subsequent updates; consult and coordinate with a diverse group of stakeholders; lead public workshops and engage in targeted outreach to affected communities; develop region-specific and multilingual educational resources on the response framework in coordination with community-based organizations; serve as the technical lead on developing monitoring plans; serve as the response and outreach lead for incident operations; provide technical support and deliver guidance and training to local air districts and health agencies on monitoring and response planning; and various other tasks.

As part of the costs outlined above, ARB anticipates needing portable field instruments as well as air monitoring equipment to respond to planned and unplanned releases, spikes in air quality, and emergency incidents.

- 2) The Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) estimates ongoing annual costs of approximately \$423,000 for two positions, a one-time contracting cost of \$400,000, and ongoing annual contracting costs of \$150,000 (General Fund). While the bill directs ARB to develop a response framework to address sources of H₂S, in practice, ARB is very likely to consult with OEHHA in developing the required framework. OEHHA has previously developed RELs for H₂S, which are used by ARB, local air districts, and others when evaluating emissions from facilities, permitting, and conducting health risk assessments. Accordingly, OEHHA expects to lend its technical expertise to ARB in the development and updating of H₂S thresholds, participate in the required public workshops, and rely on a contractor for some of its technical support needs.
- 3) the Office of Emergency Services (OES) and the State Department of Public Health (CDPH) anticipate minor and absorbable costs to consult with ARB.
- 4) Costs of an unknown, likely absorbable, amount for the regional water quality control boards to consult with ARB.

VOTES

SENATE FLOOR: 39-0-1

YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

ABS, ABST OR NV: Gonzalez

ASM NATURAL RESOURCES: 14-0-0

YES: Bryan, Ellis, Alanis, Connolly, Garcia, Haney, Hoover, Kalra, Macedo, Muratsuchi, Pellerin, Schultz, Wicks, Zbur

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-0-4

YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache

ABS, ABST OR NV: Hoover, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

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