

County to collect license plate data for vehicle emissions study

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SAN DIEGO — After being reassured that motorists' privacy would not be compromised, the county Board of Supervisors Wednesday unanimously approved a plan to electronically collect license plate data as part of a vehicle emissions study aimed at improving air quality.

Under the plan, the county Air Pollution Control District will use automated license reader software to analyze vehicles at 12 intersections in disadvantaged communities, including Barrio Logan, Logan Heights, Sherman Heights and western National City.

A state grant will pay for the \$5,500 automated license plate reader system, which will collect license plate numbers and vehicles' weight, make and model.

Jon Adams, assistant director of APCD, said the data will be collected in a secure method and kept at the district office, and would not be shared with anyone else. He said information, including license plate numbers, will be deleted after three days.

Other agencies, including the California Air Resources Board and Port of San Diego, already use the same software, Adams said.

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APCD officials met over the last two months with various community groups and the Portside Community Steering Committee, which includes representatives of private and public organizations.

The district's Community Air Protection Program was developed in response to Assembly Bill 617, which is aimed at reducing exposure to air pollutants in disadvantaged communities.

At its Sept. 11 meeting, the Board of Supervisors expressed concerns over potential privacy violations

and asked district officials to present alternatives.

Two residents urged the board to support data collection, saying the end goal of cleaner air is a worthy cause.

Sandy Naranjo, a Portside Steering Committee member, said “information and transparency are crucial for our communities, because we are tired of getting sick.”

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Joy Williams, an Environmental Health Coalition member, said her group has been working in Barrio Logan and surrounding communities for decades and heard numerous complaints about pollution sources, including mobile ones.

Supervisor Greg Cox said any time the county can get so many groups to agree, it’s a good sign and “makes it a pretty easy decision on our part.”

Supervisor Kristin Gaspar said she appreciated the reassurances relating to privacy. “I believe that we have the best intentions with this program,” Gaspar said.

Supervisor Nathan Fletcher said no group of children should be “eight times more likely to develop asthma because of where they live or the color of their skin.”

“We have to take swift, bold action and spend money in a way that represents the greatest investment,” Fletcher said, adding he hopes this program gets underway quickly.

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