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THE THUNDER HAS BEGUN

There’s a storm brewing around the topic of motorcycle emissions, and it’s coming to your front doorstep.

Or, more specifically, to your garage.

Back in July of 2013, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) was directed to conduct an assessment to determine the, “exhaust and evaporative emissions impacts of uncontrolled off-highway motorcycles.” Before I go any further, dear reader, let me decode the above information for you. Let’s start with the word “uncontrolled.” This refers to an area of our lives that is currently unregulated and in which the government—by way of CARB—would like to create further laws so as to have more control. In this case, the proposed laws relate to evaporative emissions (a “shed test” that measures the emissions of a non-running motorcycle in a heated chamber to simulate a bike sitting in a garage in the summer) and exhaust emissions (by way of a smog test in which tail-pipe emissions are measured on a glorified dyno that simulates a rolling road). Together, these emissions tests will ostensibly provide the justification for increased regulations. In other words, CARB is on a fact-finding mission for specific data that allows it to create the regulations it needs to have more control over off-road riders.

How do I know this? Because CARB told me so. To be precise, Manjit Ahuja, branch chief of CARB’s Monitoring and Laboratory Division, specifically stated during an OHMC Workshop at CARB’s El Monte headquarters in February that the evaporative emissions tests were, “a fact-finding mission for the justification of future regulations,” much to the disbelief of a room full of off-road riders and industry advocates.

Mr. Ahuja’s candor was surprising; it’s not often the cat tells the mice what kind of barbecue sauce he’s got simmering on the stove. Following the workshop, we received a brief tour of CARB’s testing facility, where we were shocked by how utterly non-representative these tests are of real-world off-road users. For example, CARB intends to tip over a bike to simulate fuel leaking from the vent hose and then test it for evaporative emissions! Seeing as how garage tip-overs are uncommon and urban riding areas are nonexistent, this ridiculous test is nothing more than a way for CARB to pencil-whip the emissions numbers so it appears as if every bike out there is pouring raw fuel out the bottom, which is absurd! This is just one of several ways in which CARB intends to manipulate testing procedures to get the data it can use to erode our individual rights, all in the name of increased control.

Let’s not forget that these are the same smiling folks who have stuck the off-road motorcycle industry with some unbelievable fines in the past few years. CARB records indicate that in 2012, the fines relating to just 11 OHV infractions cost manufacturers a whopping $16,000,000, and that’s just for off-road! The Air Resources Board is also responsible for regulating things such as particulate matter (e.g., dust), and in addition to shutting down motocross tracks it has also worked hard to eliminate campfires on the beach, chase revenue-generating industry out of the state, and mandate that Californians use special gasoline in their cars that costs roughly 25 percent more than the rest of the country. In my opinion, CARB would make much bigger improvements to the air quality in California if it targeted the jumbo jets landing at LAX, regulated the industrial pollution that is wafting across the ocean from China, or if it asked for help from off-roaders (who arguably love and want to preserve the outdoors more than the average Sierra Clubber) rather than simply trying to regulate our sport into extinction.

CARB is gearing up for an incredibly aggressive series of regulations that have the potential to be more detrimental to our sport than the similarly ludicrous “Lead Ban” which took considerable effort and incredible resources for us to fight. And if you don’t live in California and fancy yourself safe from these regulations, think again: CARB is a division of the California Environmental Protection Agency, which works with the Federal EPA, which is equally interested in further regulation of OHVs. What the long-term effects of all of this will be on OHV users and manufacturers is yet to be seen, but they could range anywhere from restricted use and increased emissions equipment regulations to an all-out ban on two strokes (all of which could come fairly quickly, as CARB’s timetable suggests they propose a comprehensive “solution” as early as December 2015).

Of course, Dirt Rider will do everything we can to keep you in the loop, but there is no substitute for the active involvement of responsible OHV users. These workshops are open to the public, and in addition to attending them you can also write letters, make phone calls, donate to the proper organizations, and spread the word to your riding buddies about what is going on. Lastly, remember that the 2014 United States midterm elections will take place in November 2014, with all 435 seats in the House of Representatives and 33 of the 100 seats in the Senate being contested. Just sayin’.