

FACILITY MANAGER

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ROAD TO CLEAN AIR

Deadlines For Compliance With The EPA's Commuter Law Begin Soon

Some welcome it as a way to reduce traffic congestion and pollution. Others see it as an infringement on personal freedom. Still others view it as a tangle of red tape in which employers are being used as a vehicle for social change. For facility managers, it may mean a major headache unless they investigate options and prepare now for what could potentially be a major rearrangement in American business practices.

Reducing air pollution caused by rush hour traffic congestion is the current hot topic of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Known variously as the Employee Commute Option (ECO), or the Employee Trip Reduction Program (ETRP), the issue will receive much attention in the



THE EPA'S NEW EMPLOYEE COMMUTE OPTION (ECO) LAW MANDATES REDUCED COMMUTER TRIPS TO AFFECTED WORKSITES.

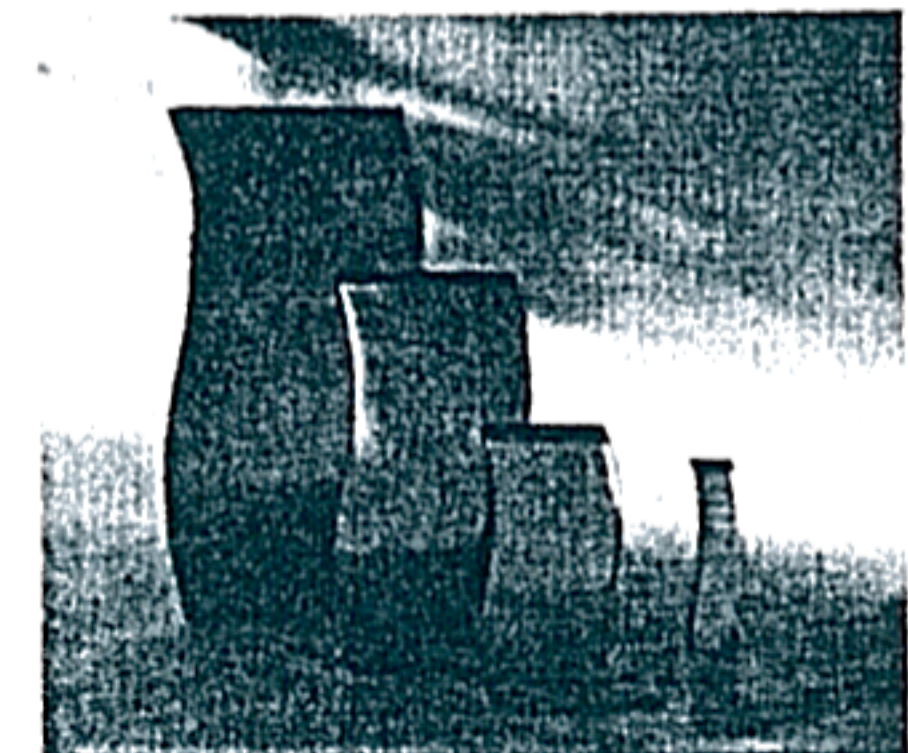
upcoming months, and will force many employers to rethink the way employees get to work.

The law, mandated by the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, calls for employers with an average of 100 or more employees at a work site to reduce the number of cars traveling to that work site between morning commute hours from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. Only businesses located in what the EPA has deemed severe to extreme ozone nonattainment areas are affected.

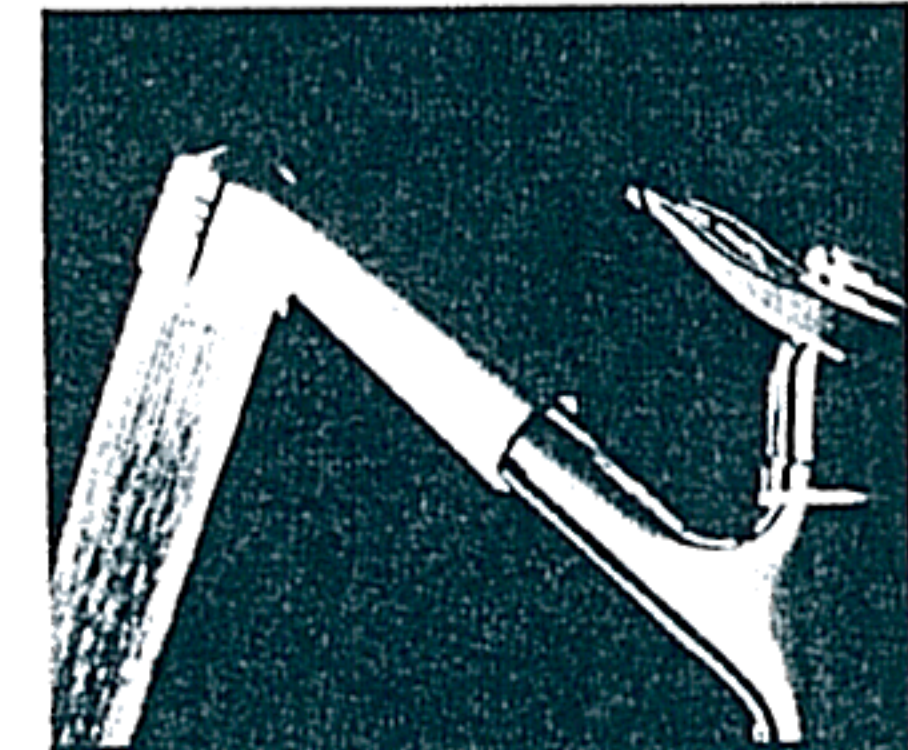
It may sound like a simple concept, but when employers start telling employees they can no longer enjoy that mind-clearing solitary commute, the fur may start to fly.

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PROS AND CONS

Opponents of the measure charge that even once the law is in effect, it will do little to help pollution problems. According to figures from the Urban Mobility Corporation, a Washington transportation consulting firm, commuter travel accounts for only one-quarter of all vehicle trips. Companies that employ more than 100 people account for only 40% of commuters. Therefore, the regulation affects only 10% of daily trips, so a 25% increase in average passenger occupancy—as called for in the law—will cause at most a 2% to 3% reduction in the number of cars.

Others argue anything will help, and that the law is simply one element of a larger strategy including production and sale of cars that operate more cleanly. The EPA says cleaner running cars alone are not enough to reduce emissions because positive measures are often offset by increased numbers of drivers and extended commutation distances.

According to a Telecommuting Fact Sheet of California Statistics, growth in the number of miles driven in California is twice that of population growth. Californians waste 200,000 hours a day due to traffic congestion, and lose another 200,000 hours a day because of traffic accidents. Traffic congestion costs the average California motorist \$3,000 a year. In New Jersey, 50% of the ozone pollution and almost 90% of the carbon monoxide pollution is caused by mobile sources, such as cars and trucks.

And the concept of reducing car trips is really not all that new. According to the EPA, approximately 55 Trip Reduction Ordinances (TRO) have been enacted in the United States since 1982. The ECO law, however, affects an estimated 11 to 12 million employees and many businesses that until now have had little contact with the Clean Air Act. A total of approximately 28,000 employers across the country are affected by the law.

Pros and cons aside, one thing remains clear—enactment of the first phase of the program is quickly approaching and, in many cases, it will fall to facility managers to deal with this summer and fall.

Anne L. Steinberg, spokesperson for Great Forest Inc., an environmental consulting firm based in

New York City, comments, "Corporate America never really looked at the way people got to work before... now they're going to have to. And it's all falling on the burden of the fm or human resources department."

Officially, the program calls for employers to submit a compliance plan by November 15th of this year. In the plan, they will have to show how within the next two years—by November 15, 1996—they will reduce the number of cars commuting to their work site. The details, however, are far more technical and include surveying employee commuter patterns, determining an average passenger occupancy (APO) rate, and coming up with a plan to increase that number to 25% above a regional average vehicle occupancy (AVO).

The law affects 14 regions within 11 states including New Jersey, Delaware, New York, Illinois, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Connecticut, Indiana, Texas, and California. Massachusetts will voluntarily be implementing a program.

THE FIRST STEP

Although the program was developed by the EPA, it is being handled on a state basis by different agencies, most commonly the state air agency or environmental agency that liaisons with the EPA. In five of the states—including New Jersey, New York, Illinois, Delaware, and Connecticut—the state Department of Transportation (DOT) will be the administrative agency. The DOT submits the information to the state environmental agency who includes it as part of an entire package called the State Implementation Plan (SIP). This package is then submitted to the federal EPA.

Each state, then, actually has different deadlines for employers, since all but five did not meet a 1992 deadline for SIP submission. Some registration deadlines occurred this past spring. In New Jersey, for instance, all employers had to register as either "unaffected" or "affected" by the end of March. In New York, the deadline was June 6th.

Connie Ruth, an environmental protection specialist in the Office of Mobile Sources of the EPA, says although all states are on different schedules, "most employers will at least start the process in 1994." Thirteen of the total 14 affected regions all have final rules in place, she adds.

A controversial topic, the ECO program has taken a lot of fire from

the business sector, but with a deadline approaching, businesses must now confront compliance.

"I think the business community has accepted the nature of the program and is working to meet the implementation requirements, less so in some states," comments Ruth. "I think there are still some people who are holding out, hoping it will go away."

Richard Fuller and Peter Hosking, president and vice president of Great Forest, have seen much of the same attitude. As strategists at an environmental consulting firm, they have expanded their business from solid waste management and recycling to helping businesses manage the ECO program.

Most businesses, they say, have greeted the program as a new hassle. "It just sits there as an addi-

tional chore in front of the fm," comments Fuller. Since deadlines to register in New York were last month, "the calls are coming in thick and fast," says Hosking.

WHO IS AFFECTED

"Affected" employers include all types of public, private, institutional, and non-profit employers with 100 or more employees at a single work site. Smaller work sites of the same employer are not subject to the ECO, however, several subsidiaries or units that occupy the same work site and report to one common governing board are considered to be one employer.

An employer of 100 who has less than 33 employees reporting to work during the peak travel periods of 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. is not affected.

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