

# LAKE COUNTY AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

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## **-MEMORANDUM-**

**To:** Board of Directors  
Jessica Pyska, Chair  
Jose "Moke" Simon  
Bruno Sabatier  
Eddie "EJ" Crandell  
Michael Green

**DATE:** April 18, 2023

**FROM:** Douglas Gearhart, APCO

**SUBJECT: Sitting as the Lake County Air Quality Management District Board of Directors: Authorize the APCO to Establish Temporary Counter Hours for the LCAQMD.**

The LCAQMD is requesting consideration of temporarily reducing office counter hours due to significant workload increases with State Reports, illegal burning, permit issues, enforcement activities, grant programs, and other mandatory activities. District Staff are unable to complete required work timely due to lack of uninterrupted work times. With only 4 staff, we directly answer nearly all phone calls without letting it go to voicemail and we help people at our counter regularly throughout the day. The result is that staff does not have uninterrupted work time. This has led to us having so little time for the normal workload activities that tasks that should take only a few hours or a day to complete are now taking days or weeks. This is creating delays in permitting and projects throughout the County. We are not exceeding our statutory requirements, but we are having some delays that are longer than our goals.

Currently we are experiencing days where we only have one staff person available at the office and we have to close the office when there is a complaint investigation, field work, inspections, meetings, and other essential/mandatory activities. This results in unscheduled office closures that in many cases could be avoided if we modify the hours that we are fully open to the public. Many of the above activities can be performed during scheduled office closures, so we can keep the office open during the scheduled open hours. Additionally there is concern for staff safety, as we are experiencing a significant increase in animosity toward government agencies and staff from certain persons in the community, so I prefer to always have two staff

persons available in the office.

As a result of the above, I am requesting to close our counter to walk in traffic Monday through Thursday from 8am to 10am and 4pm to 5pm and assist the public during those times by appointment. Typically from 8am to 10am we are swamped with phone calls and we have a significant number of burn inspections that occur as well as the paperwork required after the inspections are complete. In addition we need time to have staff meetings, trainings, and to go over emergency issues that need resolution. During these hours, we are already short staffed and unable to provide normal services, so it is best to just make that a standard counter closure so the public is aware. The same issues exist with the 4pm to 5pm time period, we are doing forecasting, burn approvals for the following day, and attempting to close out projects for the day. We have minimal walk in traffic after 4pm and if staff is available we commit to providing assistance.

In order to catch up on major projects and complete the fee rule and other essential rule updates, In addition to the above, I am proposing to make Friday a staff work day and open by appointment only. This will allow staff to concentrate and get some of these major projects completed that we just haven't had time to finish. I am not proposing a complete closure, as we will provide services, respond to phone messages and emails, and provide in person services by appointment. I am requesting this proposal be approved as a temporary measure for 6 months.

The reason I am requesting these significant changes is that our work load is increasing, we have major permitting projects to work on including geothermal power plant modifications, gas stations, an backup generators all of which require multiple staff to complete. We have over 100 enforcement cases still in process, many of which are complicated and take significant time. And we receive complaints regularly, which require immediate response. The level of stress is increasing, we are having to deal with increasingly aggressive individuals in the field and coming to the office, we lack time for regular staff meetings and training, and staff is unable to make progress on projects. I have very good staff that I cannot easily replace, so I need to ensure that they are given every opportunity to perform and complete essential work, and that I can provide the time and training they need to progress.

I would like to start this as soon as possible, as we have significant workload and delays are continuing to increase.

**Recommendation:** That the Board of Directors authorize the APCO to close the office to walk-in traffic Monday through Thursday from 8am to 10am and 4pm to 5pm, and all day Fridays for 6 months.