

CALIFORNIA SMOG RULES MAY BE USED NATIONWIDE

By **ERICA WERNER**

WASHINGTON Jun 29, 2006 (AP)— The federal government may use California's strict pollution rules for lawnmowers and other small-engine machines as a national standard, a top Environmental Protection Agency official said Thursday.

While environmentalists and air quality regulators would welcome the development, it would be bad news for much of the small engine industry. California aims to cut smog emissions from the highly polluting engines by about 35 percent.

Margo Oge, director of EPA's office of transportation and air quality, said implementing California's standard nationally could work well, though no final decision has been made.

"We believe harmonizing with California will be cost-effective, good for the environment, good for the industry, good for all the stakeholders," Oge said after a hearing Thursday on California's request for an EPA waiver so it can implement the rules.

"We are concerned that as other sources are being controlled, this source is going to continue to be a bigger source for air pollution, so we are pretty interested in finishing our work and putting forth cost-effective standards for the country," she said. "... A strong option that we're considering is harmonizing with California."

EPA is considering California's waiver request even as it works to write the national small-engine rules. Both decisions are expected by year's end, after lengthy delays because of opposition from Sen. Christopher "Kit" Bond, R-Mo.

Missouri is home to two factories owned by Briggs & Stratton Corp., the nation's largest small engine maker. Briggs & Stratton has resisted California's approach, which would require adding catalytic converters to the small engines that power lawn mowers, leaf blowers, chain saws and other devices.

The company says adding catalytic converters would be so costly that jobs would have to be sent overseas, and also has contended there could be fire safety risks. An EPA study mandated by Bond rejected any safety risk when it was released in March, but Bond and the small-engine industry have criticized that finding, and the industry is funding its own, separate safety study.