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EDITORIALS

The air board knew

Diesel rules OK'd despite scientist's deception

According to a document provided this week by the California Air Resources Board, on Dec. 10, 2008, air board scientist Hien T. Tran admitted to Bart Croes, head of the air board's research department, that he had lied about having a Ph.D. in statistics from the University of California Davis. Tran was no minor player in the air board hierarchy. He was the lead scientist and coordinator of an ambitious, far-reaching study on diesel emissions that air board leaders thought made a powerful case for sweeping new rules governing the heavy-duty trucks responsible for most such emissions.

At this point, the air board's responsibilities were plain: It should have immediately suspended Tran and commissioned an independent outside evaluation of Tran's work. And it should have put off action on proposed regulations based on Tran's research.

Instead, on Dec. 12, the board voted unanimously for the rules.

Reporters covering the high-profile hearing at which this action was taken were not told that the air board knew the lead scientist on the study justifying the regulations had lied about his academic credentials.

This did not come to light until this week, when the air board released to the *Union-Tribune* its 12-page "Notice of Adverse Action" detailing Tran's demotion and 60-day unpaid suspension and the findings of fact used to justify the punishment.

The air board's treatment of Tran is astounding in its leniency. But by far the bigger story here is the confirmation that the air board adopted the diesel rules even after a giant shadow had been cast over the legitimacy of the research on which the rules were based.

This is shameful, irresponsible and dishonest. Compounding this offense: The air board has refused to order an independent review of Tran's work. How is this possible?

Tran is no longer the sole villain in this scandal. He is now only one of many.