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E.P.A. Is Petitioned to Limit Ship Emissions

By Felicity Barringer

SAN FRANCISCO — The California attorney general and a coalition of environmental groups have called for federal regulation to curb heat-trapping emissions from the worldwide fleet of about 90,000 oceangoing ships, including container ships, tankers and cruise ships.

The regulations, sought in separate petitions to the Environmental Protection Agency, would apply to United States territorial waters.

Only six countries generate more emissions of greenhouse gases than the world's oceangoing vessels, said Michael Hirshfield, a senior scientist with Oceana, an ocean-protection organization.

The group's petition, whose participants included the Center for Biological Diversity and Friends of the Earth, argues that "the sheer number of these ships, coupled with operating practices that use fuel inefficiently and poor government oversight, results in carbon dioxide emissions" equal to the emissions of 130 million to 195 million cars.

While regulation of ship-generated air pollution and regulation of

greenhouse gases have been on California's agenda for years, this is among the first efforts to deal with the two simultaneously.

California air-pollution regulators, both statewide and in the Los Angeles area, have for several years focused on conventional pollutants from ship engines, which contribute 50 percent of the smog-related sulfur dioxide emissions in the greater Los Angeles area, according to Peter Greenwald, a senior policy adviser with the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

But a federal district court judge blocked a recent effort by the state to require ships to use low-sulfur fuel when they come within 24 miles of the California coast. The requirement, the judge said, impermissibly preempted the federal Clean Air Act.

In the new petitions, Attorney General Edmund G. Brown and the environmental groups argue that a Supreme Court decision last year opened the door for the E.P.A. to regulate greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act. They are asking the agency to do the same for emissions from large marine engines. "In terms of the law, E.P.A. can act" in territorial waters, Mr. Brown said.

The idea of unilateral regulation of an international industry drew quick criticism.

Joe Angelo, the deputy managing director of Intertanko, a group representing independent tanker operators, said the best approach was "to reduce emissions worldwide — universally — not just unilateral action in the United States or the European Union."

The environmental groups suggested two ways to cut ship-generated emissions: forcing ships to curb their speed and to change to a higher-grade fuel than the thick "bunker" fuel that is commonly used.

But T. L. Garrett, a vice president of the Pacific Merchant Shipping Association, said greenhouse gases created by distilling the thick bunker fuel into higher grades would probably exceed the amount kept from the atmosphere by reductions in emissions.