

News From NJ Senate Democrats



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SMITH BILLS TO CUT DOWN ON DIESEL EMISSIONS APPROVED IN COMMITTEE

TRENTON - A package of bills sponsored by Senator Bob Smith to cut down on emissions from diesel engines and clean up New Jersey's air was approved by the Senate Environment Committee today.

"We need to do something about the worsening air quality in New Jersey, and scaling back emissions from diesel engines is a good start," said Senator Smith, D-Middlesex and Somerset, the Chairman of the Environment Committee. "With the technology currently on the market, we can retrofit many of the diesel engines on our roadways today to operate cleaner, and ensure healthier breathing for everyone in the Garden State."

The bill, S-1759, would establish a program to reduce fine particle emissions from certain vehicles and equipment powered by diesel engines. The program would establish new, stricter standards for diesel particulate emissions for certain regulated fleets of vehicles, such as commercial buses, sanitation vehicles and school buses with diesel engines, to limit exposure of the public to these emissions. It would also prohibit the operation in the State of any regulated on-road diesel vehicle that is not in compliance with the heightened emissions standards, and would authorize the Department of Transportation (DOT) to examine truck routes, to relieve congestion of diesel truck traffic in residential neighborhoods and minimize the exposure of children to diesel emissions.

The bill was amended in committee to require that all retrofittings to be conducted by State-authorized retrofitting centers under contract with the State of New Jersey.

"With State-authorized and regulated retrofitting centers performing the work, we can be sure that it will be done right, and we can get better deals for operators with a State contract than they might be able to get with individual contracts," said Senator Smith.

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The Senator argued that recent figures highlight the need for enhanced particulate restrictions. According to a report last year by the Clean Air Council, New Jersey faces 350-1200 deaths annually from air particulate pollution. The State Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) reported that in 2004, there were approximately 68,000 asthma attacks in New Jersey, and 6,000 ER visits, due to diesel particulate pollution.

"If we don't do something soon about the air quality in New Jersey, we are going to literally be choked out of our homes," said Senator Smith. "The figures that are being compiled on the effects of increased diesel emissions paint a terrifying picture on just how bad the air has gotten in the Garden State. We need to act fast to limit diesel emissions and ensure easier breathing for all of New Jersey."

S-1759 was approved by the Committee by a vote of 3-2.

The second bill, SCR-113, would propose a constitutional amendment, to be voted on as a ballot initiative, to dedicate a portion of the revenue generated by the State's Corporate Business Tax (CBT) to air pollution control. The bill would dedicate 20 percent of the CBT's environmental dedication over the next 10 years to provide grants for the cost of air pollution control equipment and to reduce the levels of particulate matter emissions from diesel-powered engines.

"Considering the impact from industry on the levels of particulate matter emissions in New Jersey's skies, it is only fitting that they contribute to part of the cleanup," said Senator Smith. "We've already designated a portion of the CBT to help improve New Jersey's environment, and there is no greater issue concerning environmental health in our State than the quality of the air we breathe. This bill would allow voters, through ballot initiative, to set the State's priorities for environmental spending for the next 10 years."

SCR-113 was approved by the Committee by a vote of 3-2

Both bills now head to the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee before going to the full Senate for consideration.

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