

News From NJ Senate Democrats

Released on: June 27, 2005

SMITH MEASURES TO PROTECT AIR QUALITY GO TO GOVERNOR

Revolutionary Diesel Pollution Controls Pending Codey Signature to Become Law

TRENTON - A bill package sponsored by Senator Bob Smith which would regulate and reduce diesel emissions in New Jersey and vastly improve the State's air quality was approved by both houses of the Legislature today, and head to the Governor to be signed into law.

"New Jersey is well on the road to cleaner skies, and the prize is just over the horizon," said Senator Smith, D-Middlesex and Somerset, the Chairman of the Senate Environment Committee. "Diesel pollution is a poison that fouls the air we breathe, and increases the risk of certain respiratory and cardiac illnesses that can prove to be fatal. We need better controls on emissions levels, and an across-the-board reduction on air pollution, to provide for a safer, healthier New Jersey for future generations."

The first bill, S-1759, would establish a program to reduce 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 -- including commercial buses, sanitation vehicles and school buses -- with diesel engines, to limit the public's exposure to these emissions. It would establish a diesel engine retrofit program for most public and private diesel vehicles, to cut down on the emissions from diesel vehicles, would require school buses in the State to be equipped with closed crankcase technology, in order to limit the in-cabin exposure to diesel pollutants for children, and would impose stricter enforcement standards for diesel vehicle idling and a deadline for adoption of ultra-low sulfur fuel, which is less harmful to the State's air quality.

"Technology has advanced to allow our State's huge transportation and trucking industries to continue to operate without jeopardizing the health of our State's residents," said Senator Smith. "During negotiations on this bill, many business leaders in these industries seemed hopeful that the new technologies would mean cleaner-burning diesel engines and less pollution in our skies."

Senator Smith said 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 emergency room visits in New Jersey, that can be attributed to diesel particulate pollution.

"Diesel pollution costs the people of New Jersey more than \$70 million annually in health care costs," said Senator Smith. "It is responsible for hundreds of deaths each year in this State alone, and disproportionately affects children and the chronically ill. Diesel emissions are by far the most dangerous form of air pollution choking our skies today, and we need reductions in place to protect our State's most vulnerable."

S-1759 was approved by the Senate by a vote of 37-0, and identical legislation, A-3182, was approved by the Assembly by a vote of 73-5, with one abstention.

The second bill, SCR-113, which was approved last week by the Senate, would propose a constitutional amendment, for consideration by New Jerseyans on the November ballot, to dedicate a portion of the revenue generated by the State's Corporate Business Tax (CBT) to air pollution control and grants for diesel engine retrofits. The proposed amendment would not raise taxes, but would dedicate 20 percent of the CBT's current revenue over the next 10 years to provide grants for the cost of air pollution control equipment that will reduce the levels of particulate matter emissions from diesel-powered engines.

SCR-113 was approved by the Assembly by a vote of 74-5.

Senator Smith noted that, once these bills are signed into law, since they deal with a constitutional amendment, the air pollution control question will be placed on this November's ballot, to be decided on by the voters during the General Election. Senator Smith added that he will be working with environmental groups, and Assemblyman John McKeon, co-sponsor in the Assembly and Chair of the Assembly Environment and Solid Waste Committee, throughout the summer and fall to raise public awareness about the need for diesel regulation, to inform voters of the issue before they get to the polls.

"While we've received overwhelming support in the State Legislature, we must still make the case to the people of New Jersey to get these protections adopted," said Senator Smith. "Considering that the constitutional amendment relies on an already-imposed portion of the CBT, and that we're using existing State funds to clean up our environment, I predict that the people of New Jersey will be very supportive. However, we must continue the public awareness campaign, because failure to act today will surely mean deadly skies tomorrow."

The bills now head to the Governor to be signed into law.

###