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SMITH LANDMARK DIESEL REDUCTION MEASURE SIGNED INTO LAW

Diesel Pollution Controls Will "Clean Air, Save Lives"

TRENTON - A bill sponsored by Senator Bob Smith which would regulate and reduce diesel emissions in New Jersey and vastly improve the State's air quality was signed into law today by Governor Codey.

"Today is a great day for New Jersey's environment, because we are reclaiming our air from some of the most harmful pollutants fouling our State's skies today," said Senator Smith, D-Middlesex and Somerset, the Chairman of the Senate Environment Committee. "Research has shown a strong correlation between diesel emissions and a higher-than-normal incidence of respiratory disease, cardiac arrests and premature death. Without action, the future of breathable air in the Garden State was in question, but with the Governor's signature, we're looking ahead to safer and cleaner skies down the road."

The 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 engines, 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.

"With today's technology, we can have a strong transportation industry without cutting off the State's fresh air supply," said Senator Smith. "During the committee hearings we held on this bill, many advocates from within New Jersey's business community came forward in favor of a diesel reduction program, because they recognized that it's the right thing to do. Reducing diesel emissions will benefit all of New Jersey in the long-run."

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.

"The price tag associated with diesel pollution is in excess of \$70 million annually, and that cost is borne on the backs of all New Jerseyans in terms of health care costs and missed days work," said Senator Smith. "That is on top of the loss in human life, the value of which cannot be measured. Simply put, we cannot afford to turn a blind eye on the effects of diesel and the continued pollution of our State's airways."

S-1759 was approved in June 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.

Senator Smith noted that another bill, SCR-113, which was approved concurrently with S-1759, was filed with the Secretary of State early this summer. SCR-113 proposes 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.

The Senator added that because SCR-113 relies on the public's support at the polls, he will be making a push, along with Senator John McKeon, the bill's prime sponsor in the Assembly, and environmental advocacy groups in the State, to raise public awareness about the need for added funds to combat air pollution

"The constitutional amendment will make it possible to realistically achieve many of our goals in reducing air pollution, without saddling the taxpayers of New Jersey with an added burden," said Senator Smith. "As we move into the fall, Assemblyman McKeon and I will be campaigning for clean air, to ensure that the residents of the Garden State know that their votes are also needed for one of the most far-reaching air pollution control initiatives in recent years. Given the support we've already seen in the State Legislature, and the public support for other environmental initiatives in the past, I predict that on Election Day, the residents of this State will side with good environmental policy and approve the constitutional amendment."

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