

Cleaner Air for New Jersey

Reducing Harmful Emissions to Ensure Better Health

By Senator Bob Smith and Assemblyman John McKeon

Air pollution has a very negative impact on our health, especially when it comes to children and seniors. The major air pollution problem in New Jersey today stems from the harmful chemicals and particulates emitted from diesel-powered engines. Diesel emissions can contain as many as 40 different hazardous substances, 15 of which are carcinogens.¹ Exhaust from the 13 million diesel vehicles on the road in the United States is linked to increased cases of asthma, respiratory disease, heart attacks and premature deaths.

Earlier this year, the Boston-based Clean Air Task Force announced that New Jersey ranks second in the nation in harmful diesel emissions. Those harmful emissions cause cancer in roughly one in every 1,600 New Jersey residents. The national average is one in every 2,754 people. In the New York metropolitan area in 1999, diesel soot is linked to 2,729 deaths. The New York, Philadelphia and Trenton metro areas have some of the highest occurrences of cancer, heart problems and death from diesel emissions. Also, according to the federal Environmental Protection Agency, New Jersey does not meet health-based standards for fine particle pollution.

These statistics are just some of reasons why, along with Senator Leonard Lance, we are proud to have sponsored legislation to reduce diesel emissions in New Jersey. The legislation was signed into law by Acting Governor Richard Codey on September 7, 2005. It will establish programs to reduce harmful diesel emissions over the next 10 years. The reductions would be accomplished in large part through retrofit technology, including filters.

The retrofits would be paid for through the Diesel Risk Mitigation Fund. The fund would be created by a constitutional amendment, approved by the voters to rededicate a portion of the Corporate Business Tax that is already dedicated for environmental protection. This means no new taxes are needed for this project. Over the next 10 years, the program will cost about \$107 million and will retrofit public, private and school busses with devices that will reduce the amount of diesel particulate emissions in areas of New Jersey that have the highest population concentrations.

Though USEPA regulations requiring reduced emissions from diesel engines take effect in 2007, those rules only apply to new vehicles. When many diesel-powered vehicles can stay on the road for 30 years, we need to address the pollution emitted from older, dirtier vehicles. Thanks to technology, including filters and improved diesel fuels, we can. According to the Clean Air Task Force, particle filters, combined with the use of Ultra Low Sulfur Diesel fuel, have been found to reduce the amount of harmful particulates contained in diesel exhaust by up to 90 percent. And the health risk posed by diesel emissions can be virtually eliminated if emissions control

¹ Schneider, Conrad G. and L. Bruce Hill. "Diesel and Health in America: The Lingering Threat." Clean Air Task Force, February 2005.

strategies that are available today are enacted.² Programs to reduce diesel emissions are already at work in California and Texas.

A reduction in diesel emissions in New Jersey will not only improve air quality and reduce respiratory problems, but it could also save anywhere from 300 to 800 lives annually. It is estimated that New Jersey can save \$70 million annually on health care costs for people who suffer from asthma and other health problems as a result of breathing diesel emissions.

The Clean Air Task Force's report on the health effects of diesel emissions says: "The vast majority of the deaths due to dirty diesels could be avoided by an aggressive program over the next 15 years to require cleanup of the nation's existing diesel fleet. Practical, affordable solutions are available that can achieve substantial reductions in diesel risk. The only thing that stands between us and dramatically healthier air is the political will to require these reductions and the funding to make it a reality."³

The Governor and the Legislature have put this important public question on the ballot this November. We hope for the sake of all New Jersey residents, you will support this important initiative and help to reduce air pollution in the Garden State by voting "yes" on Question No. 2 on this November's ballot.

Bob Smith, represents parts of Middlesex and Somerset counties. He is chairman of the Senate Environment Committee.

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² Ibid

³ Ibid