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Researchers Investigate Reductions in Port Drivers' Exposure to Toxic Diesel Exhaust; Technology Exists for Cleaner Commerce but Report Shows Independent Contractors Can't Afford Cost

Environmental-Labor Alliance Urges NY-NJ Ports to Shift to a Business Model Requiring Capitalized, Polluting Industry to Assume Responsibility for Fleet Clean-Up

NEWARK – Researchers teamed up with public health and worker advocates this week to investigate changes in diesel pollution levels in a Jersey City port driver's diesel rig. Dr. Bruce Hill deployed an array of air quality monitoring devices inside the cab of the tractor-trailer truck to measure the diesel exhaust that driver Kenel Hyppolite was exposed to during his daily route in and out of the Newark/Elizabeth Seaport April 7-9. He measured air quality inside and outside the truck before and after it was retrofit with two widely available filter devices.

"Our previous studies have shown dramatic reductions in engine and tailpipe emissions with the diesel filters" said Dr. Bruce Hill, Senior Scientist with the Boston-based Clean Air Task Force (CATF). "We have seen diesel particulate filters reduce hazardous diesel soot particles by 100 to 1,000 times at the tailpipe, virtually eliminating tailpipe pollution" he concluded in a debrief with the Coalition for Healthy Ports, a diverse alliance of over 20 environmental and labor organizations in the region.

Diesel exhaust particles are a complex mixture of carcinogenic substances and are the cause of an estimated 21,000 premature deaths a year in the U.S. according to a CATF report www.catf.us/goto/dieselhealth. Exposure to particles has been linked to heart disease, lung cancer, and asthma and result in over 2 million lost work days a year in the U.S.

"I signed up for this test project because I hate that black smoke spews from my rig as I turn into Newark neighborhoods, and I'm sick of breathing the toxic fumes every time I get behind the wheel," said Hyppolite. "But independent contractor drivers like me are forced to choose between food and fuel. We want to drive new clean trucks so badly, we just can't afford them."

A new Rutgers study confirmed Hyppolite's first-hand view of his workforce's economics. Dr. David Bensman of the School of Management and Labor Relations found that among the roughly 7,000 professional haulers at the Ports of New York and New Jersey, three-quarters are treated as "independent contractors" by their company and only net an average of \$28,000 per year after expenses, fuel and insurance. Most struggle to afford even the most routine repairs and upgrades, and lack health insurance or pension benefits.

Because Hyppolite couldn't afford the cost himself, Cummins Emission Solutions donated one of the retrofits and Cummins Power Systems volunteered to install the retrofits on truck for the project. The second retrofit had to be removed from his rig at the conclusion of the monitoring this week.

The Rutgers study also found that since the industry was deregulated, most port drivers are forced to own the primary tool of the trade – the truck – which is on average 11 years old. Diesel engines of this vintage pollute at least ten times more than modern ones, consume more fuel, cost more to maintain, and require frequent repairs. Health studies indicate that the drivers' exposure to vehicle exhaust result in elevated mortality rates.

Each day nearly 10,000 truck trips are generated as a result of port commerce. Those trucks travel through port-adjacent neighborhoods and surrounding highways, exposing residents and commuters to diesel air pollution. One in four school age children in Newark have asthma, which is double the national and state average.

“The broken port trucking system is a major source of pollution, and health impacts from diesel soot in our state will soon have an annual cost of approximately \$4.8 billion,” said Amy Goldsmith, Director of the NJ Environmental Federation and Chair of the Coalition for Healthy Ports. “Clearly, poverty and pollution go hand in hand at the ports, and no longer can officials and elected leaders turn a blind eye to this crisis.”

The Coalition for Healthy Ports is urging a solution modeled after the Port of Los Angeles' “Clean Trucks Program,” which has been lauded by environmentalists and economists alike as a green-growth initiative that should become the model for port trucking nationwide. Launched on October 1, 2008, it will reduce emissions from port trucking by 80%, deliver over \$5 billion to the regional economy, and drastically reduce security risks. The program removes the burden of cost for clean trucks from individual, underpaid drivers and assigns it to the trucking companies and their economically powerful retail clients who profit from goods movement. Capitalized firms must legitimately employ their drivers and take full responsibility for clean trucks, and in exchange, receive handsome subsidies.

Last fall, in a public forum on the green port policy that included LA officials and Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), Port Authority of New York and New Jersey Executive Director Chris Ward acknowledged that a clean-trucks program, which would only add a nickel to the cost of a pair of sneakers, is “inevitable.”

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About the Coalition for Healthy Ports

The Coalition for Healthy Ports is the sister organization of the Coalition for Clean & Safe Ports in LA, Oakland, and Seattle (www.cleanandsafeports.org) and is a broad coalition of environmental, labor, faith, community, environmental justice, and business organizations that seek to create sustainable ports in New York and New Jersey. The Coalition is committed to a lasting solution to clean the air and stimulate good, middle-class jobs for surrounding port communities, and includes the following organizations:

Environmental Research Foundation (Rachel.org); Environment NJ; Future City, Inc.; Garden State Alliance for a New Economy (GANE); GreenFaith; Haiti Solidarity Network of the North East (HSNNE); International Brotherhood of Teamsters; ILA Local 1588; Ironbound Community Corporation; Jubilee Immigrants' Rights Task Force; NJ Environmental Federation; NJ Environmental Justice Alliance; NJ Sierra Club; NJ Work Environment Council; Clean Water Fund; United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1360; United Nations Association USA, NJ Division; Urban Environmental Institute; Change to Win