

# Diesel reduction on November ballot

By Bradley M. Campbell

The choking, black exhaust that garbage trucks and buses often leave in their wake has left many of us gasping helplessly in frustration and disgust. Now New Jersey residents can do something about it.

Voters will be asked on Election Day, Nov. 8, to approve or reject a constitutional amendment. Ballot Question Number 2 would provide funding for an innovative retrofit program to cut exposure to harmful diesel soot emissions in school buses and to reduce deadly diesel emissions from garbage trucks, transit buses and publicly owned on-road and nonroad diesel vehicles and equipment. Without requiring any new taxes from residents or businesses and at no cost to municipalities, the retrofit program would be implemented using revenues from the constitutionally dedicated Corporate Business Tax Fund, if the ballot question is approved.

Under New Jersey's diesel initiative, the most comprehensive in the nation, diesel-powered school buses, both publicly owned and privately contracted, would be fitted with closed crankcase technology in their engines to reduce diesel exhaust that creeps into the cabin and threatens the health of our children. Particulate traps and other emission-control devices would be installed in the tailpipe or exhaust system of other eligible diesel vehicles to catch the fine-particle pollution before it is released into the air we breathe. With the third largest fleet in the nation, New Jersey would become the first state to retrofit all of its public transit buses.

A *yes* vote on this ballot question would allow this Corporate Business Tax revenue to be used to implement the diesel program. A *no* vote would withhold funding for the diesel program, barring its implementation.

Emitted from mobile sources such as garbage trucks, buses and nonroad construction equipment such as bulldozers, excavators and loaders, diesel pollution degrades our air quality. It makes the simple act of breathing a struggle for far too many children and adults in communities throughout New Jersey.

Diesel combustion releases fine particles and gases into the air. Recent worldwide studies have yielded startling findings about the health problems and complications caused by diesel-related fine-particle pollution, which is thought to be more toxic than fine-particle pollution from non-diesel sources.

These fine particles – about 30 of them would equal the width of a single strand of hair – are so dangerous because they can reach the deepest parts of the lungs. Fine-particle pollution can cause chest irritation in anyone and can accumulate in the lungs over time and enter the bloodstream, interfering with oxygen transfer to the blood and causing many health problems.

In fact, fine-particle pollution may cause more premature deaths in New Jersey than homicides and car accidents combined. Scientists estimate that up to 150 premature deaths and more than 4,000 asthma attacks could be prevented in New Jersey each year if voters approve funding to implement this diesel retrofit program.

Children breathe up to 50 percent more air per pound of body weight than adults and, with their immune and respiratory systems still developing, are particularly susceptible to both acute and chronic

respiratory problems such as asthma. Fine-particle pollution may worsen the symptoms of asthma and can trigger an asthma attack.

Many senior citizens have weakened immune systems or other health problems such as cardiopulmonary diseases that make them more prone to suffer the effects of fine-particle pollution.

Fine-particle pollution reaches its highest levels in urban areas, disproportionately exposing urban residents and workers to the dangers of diesel exhaust compared to suburban or rural areas.

While concentrations may be higher in urban areas, fine-particle pollution is a widespread problem. Residents are exposed to fine-particle pollution as they travel, work, shop or simply go about their everyday lives.

According to the American Heart Association, diabetics and people with underlying heart or lung disease also may be at particularly increased risk of health complications when exposed to high levels of fine-particle pollution. For sensitive populations such as those with allergies, fine-particle pollution can worsen their symptoms.

Voter approval to fully fund implementation of the retrofit program would enable the Department of Environmental Protection to strengthen its efforts to protect public health by reducing diesel emissions.

For the past year, DEP compliance and enforcement officials have stepped up enforcement of New Jersey's three-minute idling rule, which helps reduce fine-particle pollution by prohibiting vehicles from idling for more than three minutes in most situations. In October 2004, the DEP also reached out to every school district and every school-bus company in the state, asking them to take a no-idling pledge and providing information about the adverse health effects of diesel emissions.

Diesel-related legislation passed in June expands idling enforcement authority to your local police, empowering municipalities to crack down on fine-particle pollution that threatens residents' health and the quality of life in your neighborhoods. The law also sets fines for idling violations at a minimum of \$250 and maximum of \$1,000 per vehicle per day.

More than a half century ago, New Jersey took a significant step to protect and improve air quality by enacting the Air Pollution Control Act of 1954, one of the nation's first state laws to address air pollution. Without question, we have made great progress since that time. But the fact remains: New Jerseyans still breathe unhealthy air. Every year, it sickens thousands; in too many cases, it claims lives.

The future of New Jersey's next major air-quality initiative soon will be in voters' hands. It is up to all of us to help them make an informed decision on Nov. 8.

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