

100% Electric: Cleaning Up Truck Pollution



Photo: Jimmy O'Dea

Dangers of Truck and Bus Pollution

Air pollution has been linked to higher coronavirus death rates. Low-income communities and communities of color tend to be exposed to higher levels of air pollution than affluent, white communities, putting them at greater risk. One major source of air pollution is the cars, trucks, and buses on US roads, especially dirty diesel-powered trucks.

Although trucks account for only 10 percent of vehicles on the road, they are responsible for nearly 30 percent of carbon emissions, 45 percent of nitrogen oxide (NO_x) emissions, and 57 percent of particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) emitted by the entire transportation sector. Toxic air pollutants have major health impacts, including asthma attacks, lung cancer, heart attacks, strokes, and premature death.

More than 45 million Americans are exposed to truck pollution by working, living, or attending school near major roads, airports, or railroads, and there are significant differences in how different racial groups are impacted by vehicular pollution. A Union for Concerned Scientists [study](#) showed that Asian American, Black, and Latino communities are disproportionately harmed by air pollution from vehicles. Respectively, they face 34 percent, 24 percent, and 23 percent more exposure than white communities.

Communities of color have been subjected to decades of [residential segregation](#) and are more likely to live along major highways and roads where vehicle traffic and tailpipe pollution is extremely high and concentrated. These areas where diesel trucks pass through are called "[diesel death zones](#)."

Multi-State Truck Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

In July 2020, governors from 15 states and the mayor of the District of Columbia released a [joint memorandum of understanding](#) (MOU) on their commitment to truck electrification and eliminating toxic air pollution from medium- and heavy-duty trucks and buses by 2050.

The states committed to this effort are California, Colorado, Connecticut, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington, as well as the District of Columbia. These states collectively account for almost 50 percent of the US economy and nearly 40 percent of goods moved by truck (by value).

The MOU calls for at least 30 percent of new truck and bus sales to be zero-emission by 2030 and 100 percent zero-emission by 2050.

Governors who are interested in joining the compact are encouraged to sign the MOU and commit to truck electrification. We encourage clean transportation advocates to make this a priority for your governor in 2021.

California Advanced Clean Trucks (ACT) Rule

California made history in 2020 by adopting the nation's first and most ambitious clean truck rule, an effort led by directly impacted environmental justice communities (read more about the coalition advocacy behind this effort [here](#)).

The recently adopted Advanced Clean Trucks (ACT) rule requires manufacturers to produce zero-emission trucks beginning in 2024, and it increases production targets through 2035. Additionally, the rule aims to put 300,000 zero-emission trucks on the road by 2035. It requires that sales of medium- and heavy-duty vehicles reach at least 30 percent by 2030, 40 percent by 2035, and 100 percent by 2045.

Federal law requires that California file a waiver request with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for its regulations to enter into effect. It also authorizes states to adopt standards for new vehicles that are identical to the California standards.

We expect this waiver to be granted under a Biden-Harris administration, and states that are interested in adopting the California ACT rule will be able to begin the process of adoption.

The California ACT rule is more ambitious than the multi-state truck MOU. For us to reach our decarbonization goals, the California ACT rule is the strongest path currently to get us there.

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