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Guest View: Enforce clean-air rules for trucks

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Opinion editorial by Nidia Bautista, policy director for the Coalition for Clean Air

Californians cannot afford for the trucking industry to take two steps forward and one step back. We have taken great strides in making the trucking industry come clean. Now California must ensure that the rules and regulations that have previously been set are enforced to the fullest extent. Let's take a look back on the fight to clean up one of the most polluting industries in California.

It is clearly evident to all Californians that we are paying the high costs of poor air quality with not only our lungs and lives, but our pocket books too. Few sources of pollution are known to have a greater impact on people than diesel trucks. Several studies have shown that the particles from diesel pollution wreak havoc on our bodies, traveling through our lungs and into our bloodstream.

One year ago, researchers at Cal State Fullerton released a study revealing that Californians are paying a hefty price for breathing bad air—to the tune of \$28 billion a year! In the South Coast Air Basin, people are forking over \$1,250 each year in air pollution-related expenses; and worse, people in the San Joaquin Valley are laying out \$1,600.

In 2000, California identified diesel pollution as a known carcinogen and has since committed to reducing diesel pollution 85 percent by 2020. Since then, California has adopted dozens of rules and regulations reducing pollution from many diesel-spewing sources—except the largest source, diesel trucks—until last December.

In December 2008, the California Air Resources Board voted on one of the most important rules in the past 10

years. The heavy-duty diesel rule accelerates air quality improvements across California by regulating the millions of diesel trucks crisscrossing our highways and contaminating our air.

The heavy-duty diesel rule is expected to yield life-saving results with a 43 percent reduction in diesel particulates and a 23 percent reduction in nitrogen oxides, a key component of smog. If it remains intact, the rule will prevent 9,400 premature deaths, 150,000 asthma-related problems, and almost one million lost work days in a 10-year period.

This life-saving rule provides ample flexibility for truckers' compliance, including additional time (extended to 2014) for smaller fleets to comply. The additional time also gives truckers more opportunity to apply for the millions of dollars available in government-provided grants and loans.

Ultimately, the success of the rule—and the public health benefits—depends on truckers doing their part. California is committed to helping make this happen, and we encourage everyone to help spread the word about all the resources and assistance available.

We respect California's truck drivers; but it is time to enforce the rules we worked hard to put in place. Cleaning up dirty diesel trucks is an investment we can all make—an investment that will benefit our health, our environment and our bottom line.