

KNBC: Critics Oppose Cleanup Plan To Fix Port Trucking System

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WILMINGTON, Calif. -- Drivers from the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach along with their families and members of the Coalition for Clean and Safe Ports met Tuesday to support a plan to fix the port trucking system and put a stop to an epidemic of asthma cases in harbor-area communities.

A \$1.2 billion cleanup plan, the Clean Truck Program, was unveiled in April by Harbor Commissioners from both ports, but a trucking trade association called the California Trucking Association said they would file a lawsuit to stop the plan, saying it goes "too far, too fast," according to KNBC.

CTA issued the following statement, "California Trucking Association believes that the ports have not adequately considered the tremendous economic consequences of their plan on the overall trucking industry or individual owner operators, as well as its potential impacts on the overall movement of goods in Southern California."

The groups that are in support of the plan also wants to go an employee system where they can join unions, have wages and benefits instead of being independent contractors, NBC reported. "By the time these drivers are done paying their most basic operating expenses, their gross pay is near minimum wage," said Rafael Pizarro with the Coalition for Clean and Safe Ports.

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Port drivers steer toward clean-truck program

'On this issue, we stand with the authorities,' one worker says of the push to curb pollution.

By Louis Sahagun and Ronald D. White, Times Staff Writers

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About 300 drivers of the dirtiest and oldest trucks serving the Los Angeles-Long Beach port complex gathered in Wilmington on Tuesday to support a program that would impose stricter pollution standards on harbor vehicles.

Port authorities and environmentalists were encouraged by the strong show of support for the program, part of a plan designed to cut air pollution 80% within five years by allowing only newer, low-emission diesel trucks to work the ports.

["It's a surprising turnout," said Rafael Pizarro of Coalition for Clean Air, an advocacy group. "You don't see this many truck drivers agree on anything outside of a strike."](#)

Many of the mostly immigrant, Spanish-speaking independent drivers who filled an auditorium at Banning's Landing stepped up to a lectern and personally urged a joint panel of Long Beach and Los Angeles port commissioners to approve the program.

The proposed clean-truck program is part of the Clean Air Action Plan, which was approved in November. The program would scrap and replace the oldest trucks, and retrofit the others, with the assistance of a port-sponsored grant subsidy.

Among the speakers was Edgar Sanchez, 48, of Long Beach who said he could not afford to clean up his rig without a subsidy. Sanchez, who is among the area's 16,000 mostly low-income drivers who service the ports, said he was emboldened to speak his mind on the issue by the widespread support the program has received from environmentalists, religious workers,

business coalitions and political leaders.

"Before we didn't have the courage or the confidence to tell people how we feel out of fear we'd be fired or labeled as troublemakers," Sanchez said.

"Not anymore. We see the smoke pouring out of our trucks and we breathe it all day, every day," he said. "But we also work long hours at minimum rates. We can be fired at any moment, like slaves without a voice."

Sanchez added, "Now we have the guts and the anger to say that on this issue, we stand with the authorities."

Maria Agamenon of Long Beach, 45, spoke on behalf of her husband, Raul, a port driver of 23 years who earns roughly \$7 an hour, and their three children, two of whom have asthma.

"It's sad to see how my husband is mistreated; I cry with him," she said. "He can't breathe at night. Sometimes he shares the respirator we bought for the children."

The San Pedro Bay ports spew more soot and smog than half a million cars, a refinery and a power plant combined, port authorities said. Port trucks produce 30% to 40% of that pollution, which has been linked to higher risks of cancer, bronchitis and other respiratory ailments.

Jose Rayo, 43, who has worked the port for two decades, blamed much of the area's pollution on inefficiency, which forces drivers to spend hours waiting — with engines idling — to transfer loads. Rayo, a Los Angeles resident, was among a small number of critics of the program who worried that it would "sweep away the small businessman."

"The plan opens the doors for the big trucking outfits to monopolize the port business, but who's to say they will pay fair wages?" Rayo said. "If it doesn't work out, we'll have to fight it with lawsuits."

A week ago, the California Trucking Assn., which claims 2,300 members and about 250,000 trucks across the state, said that the ports lacked the authority "to completely change our industry" as the program could.

"The California Trucking Assn. does support the objective of cleaner air and would like to see reductions in pollutions and the greening of our side of the supply, but there are two problems with this plan," said Patty Senecal, vice president of sales and marketing for Transport Express of Rancho Dominguez, who spoke on behalf of the association. "We question the legality and the constitutionality of it."

The association questioned the program's constitutionality, saying that it would illegally supercede interstate commerce laws. The group also said it was unfair to single out port trucks. Studies have shown that the average age of a California cargo truck is 12.2 years, or just seven months younger than a port truck.

But German Merino, 53, said that his 1996 Freightliner Condo, which has several hundred thousand miles on it, was a heavy polluter. "I smell the oil burning and the diesel all day, and I work 14 to 16 hours a day," the Bellflower resident said. "For 23 years I have been part of this awful system. It has to change."

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