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Diesel trucks target of port plan

The Los Angeles and Long Beach facilities want all of the vehicles replaced as part of an effort to cut pollution in the harbor area by 45%.

By Janet Wilson
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The entire fleet of aging diesel trucks that are a leading cause of unhealthy air around the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach would be replaced, possibly at industry cost, according to the final draft of a \$2-billion plan to reduce pollution from ships, trains, terminal equipment and harbor craft by 45%.

The trucks, many owned and operated by low-income immigrant workers, would be replaced within five years, at industry expense if necessary, according to the draft released late Monday. The port commissions are scheduled to vote on adoption of the plan Nov. 20.

"The ports will explore the use of pollution-based impact fees, such as gate fees assessed on 'dirty' trucks, so that polluters pay their part to improve air quality," Long Beach officials said in a statement. "The ports will develop tariff-based incentives and requirements, such as vessel speed reduction incentives and port-mandated fuel requirements, to curb harmful air emissions."

But Geraldine Knatz, executive director of the Port of Los Angeles, said the plan would not target the truck drivers, who are on the bottom rung of the multibillion-dollar cargo industry at the two ports, the nation's busiest.

"We're not talking about placing fees on the truckers, but we are going to be exploring ways to collect revenue to replace those 16,000 aging vehicles," Knatz said.

The plan also calls for increased use of electricity to power international marine vessels at dock, rather than leaving dirty engines idling, and for improved emission standards in the harbor area to reduce health risks posed by air pollution from port-related activities.

"We listened to the community and made very significant revisions," Richard Steinke, executive director of the Port of Long Beach, said in a statement. "This plan will help us to make these the world's greenest, most environmentally friendly seaports."

While declining to offer specifics, Knatz said fees or tariffs would probably be imposed, possibly on import companies or retail giants such as Wal-Mart, and possibly in a manner similar to the existing PierPass program, which allows night shifts at the busy docks if extra fees are paid per container of goods.

More than 40% of all retail goods imported to the United States are shipped through the two fast-growing ports. That activity has made the ports the largest contributor to smog from diesel engines in the Los Angeles Basin, according to regulators.

Studies have shown that diesel exhaust causes cancer and is responsible for 70% of pollution-related health problems and hundreds of deaths annually in the Los Angeles region.

The amount of goods moved through the two ports has more than doubled in recent years. But legal challenges from environmentalists and air-quality regulators have dogged port officials as they sought to expand or build piers.

The first draft of the plan, released in June, generated hundreds of public comments, which the ports made public for the first time Monday.

Calls to the California Trucking Assn. and the Teamsters union about the truck replacement program were not returned.

Port officials said they are hopeful that a bond measure contained in Proposition 1B on today's ballot for infrastructure replacement will pass, and that a large portion of the \$1 billion set aside for air-quality improvements could be used for replacing trucks.

The plan is to be voted on at a special joint meeting of the Los Angeles and Long Beach harbor commission boards.

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