

## Clean Air Truck Plan In Battle

published Oct. 18, 2007

GAZETTE **my.style**

[Calendar  
of Events](#)

**Check Out our Hot  
Links**

[About Us](#)

[archives](#)  
[search](#)

**By Harry Saltzgaver**  
*Executive Editor*

Lines were drawn, veiled threats made and concerns voiced last Friday at a daylong workshop about a clean trucks program at the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles.

Harbor commissioners from both ports sat through a day of sometimes raucous testimony on both sides of a plan designed to replace older polluting trucks with new or retrofitted trucks over the next five years. Union leaders and environmentalists joined to support the current proposal to create an employee-based system to work with trucking companies to replace vehicles. On the other side were independent truckers, shipping companies and terminal operators arguing that the proposal was unfair and unduly expensive.

Now decisions were made Friday, although LA Harbor Commission President David Freeman called for a vote to implement some form of the clean trucks program by

Dec. 14. The program is a key component of a Clean Air Action Plan approved last year by both ports.

“We’re going to take the information from the workshop on Friday and work between our staffs,” said Long Beach Port Director Richard Steinke. “Mr. Freeman was very emphatic about getting something by the Dec. 14 date.

“I think it is clear by now that not everyone is going to be happy with the result. The thing is, we can’t afford to not do anything. We need to find some common ground.”

Under the clean air plan approved a year ago, the truck program is supposed to reduce pollution by 80% within five years. To do that, officials want to replace the oldest of the 16,000 or so trucks now hauling cargo into

or out of the ports.

To do that, the ports are promising grants and subsidies. But there also is a list of restrictions designed to block older polluting trucks from continuing to work in the port area.

As designed now, the ports would only allow port-licensed concessionaires (companies) operating “clean trucks” to enter port terminals without having to pay a new truck impact gate fee. In practice, that would require now-independent truck drivers to give up their rigs and become employees of large trucking companies, opponents say.

According to port officials, 2007 and newer trucks are 90% cleaner than older trucks. The plan would eliminate older trucks until only clean trucks remain.

Shipping industry officials estimate that the current program would cause trucking (drayage) rates to rise up to 80%. One group, the Pacific Merchant Shipping Association, argues it may not even be legal, and a proposed statewide plan would be more fair.

“As a general comment, PMSA supports a statewide emissions program to regulate trucks,” PMSA president John McLaurin said. “Given the large number of trucks in the state, and the virtual equivalency in terms of age distribution of the general truck population when compared to port drayage trucks, a program that addresses all trucks in a uniform manner would be the most effective mechanism to reduce emissions.

“In addition, we don’t understand the coupling of a driver’s employee status with a program that sets truck

emission standards. We also have serious concerns about adequate numbers of drivers and power once this plan goes into effect.”

But unionizing the truckers serving the ports would be a good thing, according to Long Beach Second District City Councilwoman Suja Lowenthal, who testified Friday. The program would allow truck drivers to earn a better living with better working conditions, she said,

She said that the bottom line was better air for Long Beach, and noted that a similar company trucks-only model already is functioning successfully in Vancouver.

“By reducing toxic air emissions, we can significantly decrease the risk of respiratory-related medical conditions negatively impacting our community and our children,” she said. By improving the quality of life for our families, we’re strengthening our communities.

“The environment can no longer make up for our reckless use of resources. I implore both Harbor Commissions to adopt the most comprehensive, widest reaching Clean Air Action Plan and Clean Trucks program available for this community, this region, and the international goods movement as a whole.”

Suja Lowenthal’s father-in-law, state Sen. Alan Lowenthal, currently is negotiating with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to craft a proposed cargo container fee bill that could raise up to \$500 million a year to combat air pollution and improve infrastructure.

Sen. Lowenthal declined to take a side in the clean truck debate. He said, however, that his bill would be able to provide financing for whatever program was implemented.

“Half of the \$500 million per year would be dedicated to air quality,” Lowenthal said. “That includes trucks, on-dock electricity, on-dock rail. But right now, the first call on the money would be trucks.”

Steinke said that, while there was no consensus Friday on what type of clean truck program should be implemented, there was one point of agreement.

“I think we all agreed that the worst outcome of all would have us in the courtroom,” Steinke said. “I hope that at the end of the day, we’ll all be happy, or at least equally unhappy.”