


Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

June 24, 2019

From the desk of
Sen. Michael Dembrow


Re: HB 2007 - Relating to engine emissions

Dear Legislators:

As Public Health professionals we urge passage of HB 2007. HB 2007 takes the long overdue step of setting an expiration date for dirty diesel engines that spew carcinogens throughout our state, starting in the Portland metro area. This bill will make the air these residents breathe safer.

Diesel engine exhaust is a poisonous mixture of gases and extraordinarily tiny toxic particles. The immediate consequence of breathing diesel exhaust is respiratory irritation and worsening of lung conditions like asthma. The tiny particles are so small that they avoid the body's natural defenses and pass into the blood, impacting all of the organ systems in the body. Long-term impacts from breathing diesel exhaust include heart and lung disease, cancer and stroke. The most profoundly concerning impacts, however, are on pregnant women and children. Exposure to diesel exhaust is linked to both low-birth weight and premature birth. Children, whose lungs and bodies are still developing, have increased risk of cancer and chronic disease because of diesel exhaust.

The tri-county region is the most urban part of the state and has the highest concentration of diesel particulate emissions. Although most of the region is many times above the state health benchmark for diesel emissions, the burden of pollution falls hardest on communities of color. An Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) study found that modeled (on-road mobile and non-road mobile) pollutants within the Portland metro region are higher in census block groups with higher proportionality of low-income households and people of color. Exposure to diesel particulate matter is directly linked with proximity to source, meaning that communities living near highways or other transportation corridors are disproportionately exposed.¹ Consequently this is not only a public health issue, but also one of equity.

The good news is that the understanding of the health danger from diesel emissions is so well known that technology, now more than a decade old, exists to dramatically reduce the threat. We do not need new inventions, we only need broader use of existing solutions and we need smart public policies, like those contained in HB 2007, to move the needle toward clean air.

Breathing is not a choice: we cannot control the quality of the air we breathe. Oregonians rely on regulation to set standards so that everyone has the opportunity to breathe clean, healthy air.

¹ Brugge, D. (2007). Near-Highway Pollutants in Motor Vehicle Exhaust: A Review of Epidemiologic Evidence of Cardiac and Pulmonary Health Risks. *Environmental Health*. 2007 6:23.
<https://ehjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1476-069X-6-23>

In the case of diesel emissions, you have a special opportunity to improve public health for everyone, but especially the health of disadvantaged and low-income communities that bear the greatest burden of diesel air pollution. This is the time to commit our state to a clean air future, the cost of inaction is too great a price to pay. Please support HB 2007 as a good first step and consider how you can expand protections in the future to other residents of the state who are breathing unhealthy levels of diesel exhaust.

