California first in the nation to require diesel vehicle manufacturers to go electric

BY CRESENCIO RODRIGUEZ-DELGADO
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Checking for compliance with air emission rules, the California Air Resources Board, assisted by the California Highway Patrol, stopped big rigs in a surprise checkpoint on North Avenue near Highway 99 on Tuesday, June 14, 2016. Mark Tavianini of BY JOHN WALKER

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SHARESHARE
In a historic move, California on Thursday became the first state in the nation to require manufacturers of diesel trucks and vans to transition to all-electric sales by 2045.

Inspired by the state's ongoing efforts to curb pollution, members of the California Air Resources Board voted unanimously in favor of the decision. The board heard from more than 100 speakers before voting during a virtual meeting.

The Advanced Clean Trucks Rule targets pollution from heavy diesel vehicles in the state's most polluted areas, often poor neighborhoods surrounded by highways, ports and warehouse distribution centers.

Zero-emission trucks are expected to be on the road by 2024. Manufacturers will need to increase the number of cleaner vehicles each year, leading up to 100% zero-emission vehicles by 2045.

The state has, in recent years, pushed to electrify many of its vehicles.

The new rule lays out different expectations of sale rates for different types of diesel vehicles like pickup trucks, school buses, tractor-trailers and delivery vans. By 2035, for example, half of pickup trucks and delivery vans will need to produce zero emissions.
The air resources board estimates 70% of smog-causing pollution comes from diesel trucks despite those vehicles accounting for 2 million of the state’s 30 million registered vehicles.

HAILED BY LA, SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY RESIDENTS

The vote was welcomed by residents from areas of the state heavily affected by pollution, like Los Angeles and the San Joaquin Valley.

In south-central Fresno, community advocates have consistently pushed for cleaner air and called for a reduction of heavy-truck traffic near communities and neighborhoods.

Shayda Azamian, a climate policy advocate with the Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability, said the industrial areas south of Fresno would see a difference thanks to the new rule.

“The trucks that we are seeing in front-line communities in Fresno definitely apply,” Azamian said. She said residents in the area have even called her to say there is too much noise along with bad air.

Azamian said advocates could leverage the rule in land-use discussions with city and county governments to maintain clean air standards.

“The hardest fight is locally,” she said.

CARB board member Diane Takvorian also hailed the rule as a win for minority communities, especially at a time of social unrest. She said addressing environmental issues for communities is a positive step toward equality.

“This rule advances racial justice,” she said. “In a time when we are talking about that every day, we need to recognize that these types of heavy-duty vehicles disproportionately impact communities of color, communities around ports and this rule is going to give the relief.”

Takvorian noted the effects of the vote wouldn’t be seen immediately, but that it also contributes to the state’s projects in cleaning up the air in specific communities identified as disadvantaged and disproportionately impacted by air pollution.

In February, the board approved a south-central Fresno plan to reduce emissions. It is one of two plans currently in place in the central and southern San Joaquin Valley.

“This (rule) is critical,” Takvorian said. “We have to do this as a board if we want to have success.”

NEXT STEPS
The air resources board is eyeing a 2021 date to hear from large fleet owners about their transition progress.

CARB members acknowledged possible hesitance from manufacturers to produce electric trucks.

Two new rules down the road will supplement Thursday’s vote, including making sure heavy-duty trucks have effective exhaust technology to minimize smog as they transition to electric.

“It's amazing that here we are in 2020 and we can see a path to getting rid of diesel for heavy-duty purposes,” said CARB member Hector De La Torre.
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