Fast Facts

Estimated number of annual work loss days in Georgia due to illness associated with diesel soot: 51,808

Estimated number of annual respiratory symptoms in Georgia children due to diesel pollution: 13,316

Number of Georgia households with someone living with asthma: 1 in 6

For More Information:
Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, Anne Blair

Mothers & Others for Clean Air at the Georgia Conservancy, Rebecca Watts-Hull

Help Georgia Attain Healthy Air by Cleaning Up Dirty Diesel Engines

What's at Stake?

Diesel engines are known for their durability, reliability and fuel economy. They also produce toxic exhaust that threatens our health and environment. Diesel engines, both on-road (trucks, buses) and off-road vehicles (construction equipment, generators, trains), emit large amounts of particulate matter, smog-forming nitrogen oxides, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, black carbon and more than 40 hazardous air pollutants.

Diesel exhaust contributes to Atlanta's failure to meet federal standards for ozone and fine particle pollution. With a growing number of mid-sized Georgia cities in danger of failing a new ozone standard, diesel exhaust could also push them into "non-attainment." Moreover, because the particles and toxins in diesel exhaust are known to cause cancer and contribute to heart and lung diseases, all people – especially children – exposed to diesel exhaust from our roadways, rail yards and construction sites are at risk, regardless of their town or city's overall air quality.

Challenges

Over time, new diesel engines will get cleaner. Federal rules require that within the next five years all new diesel engines cut their soot emissions by 90% from today's new engine levels. EPA officials estimate that by 2030, the new rules will prevent 8,300 premature deaths, 9,500 hospital visits, and 360,000 asthma attacks. However, due to very slow fleet turnover and the downturn in the economy, older and much dirtier diesel engines (legacy engines) will be on the road for at least 20-30 more years.

Next Steps

The good news is that technology exists today to address the problem of diesel exhaust. Devices that can significantly reduce diesel soot, including diesel oxidation catalysts and particulate filters, are readily available and highly effective. However, fleet owners need help paying for this equipment and its installation. The Georgia General Assembly provided $250,000 in the FY09 General Budget to serve as the state match for $1 million in federal funding for school bus retrofit devices, giving thousands of children a healthier ride to school. This appropriation was a good start. Georgia's leaders need to help reduce air pollution in Georgia and protect citizens' health by taking additional steps to clean up existing diesel engines:

- Pass a resolution creating a Joint Study Committee to document the extent of the dirty diesel challenge in Georgia.
- Establish a permanent state fund to promote retrofits of diesel engines and the use of ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel in off-road and on-road diesel vehicles.
- Require the use of clean diesel engines (repowered or retrofitted with pollution control devices) and the use of either ultra-low sulfur or biodiesel on all state construction projects.
- Support the Georgia Environmental Protection Division's proposed statewide idling reduction rule to reduce idling from all diesel vehicles.