



Environment

City ready to take stand on diesel emissions

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PROVIDENCE — The capital city is taking several stands on the environment to improve Rhode Island's air quality, and is hoping the state will follow its lead.

Last night, the City Council passed two resolutions, one paving the way for Providence to reduce diesel fuel emissions in its fleet of vehicles, the second urging the state to set targets for reducing global warming-related emissions.

Under the diesel resolution, the city's Environmental Sustainability Task Force will submit a report within 90 days detailing the number of heavy-duty diesel vehicles used or owned by the city. Once the city knows its sources of diesel pollution, Providence will seek to reduce diesel emissions from its fleet. It also recommends that the state reduce diesel emissions in its vehicle fleets.

Both resolutions were sponsored by Councilmen Seth Yurdin and Cliff Wood.

Yurdin pointed to figures that he said ranked Rhode Island as among the worst in the nation in diesel emissions, and others that he said ranked Providence as having the highest child asthma hospitalization rates in Rhode Island.

"Ten percent of Rhode Islanders have asthma, and asthma cases throughout New England have grown more than 23 percent since 2003," Yurdin said. "Air pollution from diesel fuel is a major contributor to the growing asthma problem and the government should set an example by reducing the emissions from public vehicles."

The reductions in diesel emissions can be achieved by modifying the vehicles. Depending on their age and level of use, heavy-duty diesel vehicles can be fitted with filters to trap particulates, which reduce almost all excess engine emissions, or with diesel oxidation catalysts, essentially a type of muffler that can reduce emissions by up to 90 percent.

Adding either type of filter costs roughly \$2,000 per vehicle.

Diesel vehicles can also be upgraded to use a more environmentally friendly type of gasoline, an ultra-low-sulfur diesel or a bio-diesel, a fuel made from fats or oils that contains no sulfur.

The fuels cost more per gallon than regular diesel, but can be more efficient, perhaps getting one or two miles more per gallon. On buses or trucks that get only 7 or 8 miles per gallon, that can make a difference.

"With Providence endorsing this resolution, the campaign for a statewide diesel bill has gained significant momentum," said Annie Costner, a campaign organizer for Clean Water Action, a national environmental advocacy group that has an active local branch.

Diesel emissions contain carcinogens, and according to Clean Water Action, the lifetime cancer risk from diesel emissions in Providence County is 314 times greater than the level listed as acceptable by the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

"The good news is, this is a preventable health threat and we have the technology to make dirty diesel engines 90 percent

cleaner than they are today,” Costner said.

Costner said Warwick and Cranston have already taken steps to curb diesel emissions in their bus fleets, but Providence is the first community in the state to take a citywide stand on diesel emissions.

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