

Fact Sheet: Diesel Pollution in Chicago



Chicago is a national hub for transportation. Diesel engines power many of the heavy-duty trucks, locomotives, construction equipment and railyard equipment that dot our landscape. Most of these vehicles do not have state-of-the-art pollution controls that can filter their exhaust. Without such protections, a toxic mixture of soot and gases is harming Chicagoans — particularly those who live near highways, railyards and intermodal facilities. There is a solution. You can help.

Diesel Engines in Chicago. Our city is a national hub for freight transportation, with rail yards, arterial highways, intermodal freight centers and warehouses. While this provides a huge benefit to the local economy, the health of Chicagoans also suffers.

Diesel engines power numerous types of equipment, including heavy-duty trucks, locomotives, construction equipment and rail yard equipment like cranes. If these diesel engines do not have state-of-the-art pollution controls (and many do not), their exhaust contains a toxic mixture of tiny soot particles and gases. This mixture absorbs metals and toxic

gases in the exhaust and delivers them to your lungs.

Health Risks. Diesel soot contributes to an estimated 21,000 deaths in America every year. Recently, medical researchers have begun to uncover evidence that diesel pollution can cause fatal diseases, such as cancer, stroke and heart attacks — as well as worsen asthma.

Everyone in the region is at risk from this kind of diesel pollution. However, health professionals worry in particular about those living and working in close proximity to areas where diesel engines are concentrated. Such high

numbers of diesel engines are found on major highways and arterial roads, at intermodal facilities and at large construction projects.

Solution. The good news is that this problem has a very achievable solution. Engineers have developed filters that can clean up diesel engine exhaust. All trucks and other diesel vehicles need these filters. In addition, common sense measures such as limiting idling, managing traffic better, and creating “buffer zones” between dense diesel pollution and residential areas can go a long way toward making Chicago’s air safer to breath.