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NRDC Fact Sheet:

NRDC Strongly Opposes Weakening Clean Air Protections To Encourage Diesel Cars

NRDC strongly opposes any amendments to Senator Daschle's Energy Policy Act of 2002 (S. 517) that would weaken or change EPA's ground-breaking Tier 2 emission standards for cars, light trucks and SUVs to encourage the increased sale of diesel vehicles. Some auto companies hope to weaken or delay clean air standards to sell what they ironically call "clean diesel" vehicles. However, we cannot afford to alter the timetable and stringency of these Tier 2 standards, because they are critical to protecting the public health of the more than 100 million Americans who currently live in areas that fail to meet EPA's health standards for ozone or particulate matter.

Today's Diesel Vehicles Pollute Too Much—and Diesel Fumes Can Kill

Today's diesel-fueled vehicles emit huge quantities of fine particulate matter, nitrogen oxides and dozens of toxic chemicals. While these vehicles can be more fuel-efficient, the health impacts of diesel emissions make this a bad – and unnecessary – trade-off, given the ability of today's gasoline-powered vehicles technologies to meet S.517's 35-mpg average requirement.

- Diesel particulate matter has been linked with a wide range of health impacts, including increased asthma attacks and respiratory emergencies, cancer, endocrine disruption, cardiopulmonary ailments, and premature death.
 - Diesel engines emit many more particulates than gasoline engines—in midtown Manhattan, diesel engines emit more than half of the particulate matter inhaled by pedestrians, even though gasoline vehicles outnumber diesel vehicles by ten-to-one in New York State.
- Diesel exhaust contains more than 40 different chemical compounds that cause cancer, reproductive harm or other toxic impacts. Consequently, diesel exhaust has been found to be either a known, probable or likely carcinogen by the U.S. EPA, the U.S. National Toxicology Program, the U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, and the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer.
 - The California Air Resources Board estimates that 71 percent of the airborne cancer risk in Southern California is due to the 2 percent of vehicles that are diesel-fueled.
- Nitrogen oxides (NOx) contribute to ground-level ozone formation, acid deposition, nutrient pollution of waterways, crop damage and secondary (i.e., atmospheric) formation of particulate matter. Just as with particulates, diesel vehicles emit disproportionately high levels of NOx, compared to gasoline vehicles.
 - Diesel vehicles are responsible for 34.5 percent of all NOx emissions nationwide, despite fueling only about 12 percent of all vehicle miles traveled.

EPA's Tier 2 emission standards already allow diesel cars to be sold, and shouldn't be weakened or delayed.

Car companies that want to sell diesel cars often say, "our diesels are now clean." Yet, the auto industry is expected to support amendments to S. 517 that would exempt these vehicles from the current Tier 2 emission standards altogether; delay the implementation of Tier 2; or add new,

weaker emission standards for diesels in a revised Tier 2. Support of these amendments is fundamentally inconsistent with the notion that today's diesels are "clean" and can meet current air protection standards.

The Tier 2 standards, which will be phased in from mid-2003 to 2010, are most noteworthy for closing an emissions gap that separates today's car emission standards from the emission standards that govern SUVs and light-duty trucks. Moreover, the Tier 2 standards allow auto makers to sell cars that are certified at various emission levels (called "bins" that rank from the cleanest Bin 1 to the dirtiest Bin 11), so long as their overall fleet emissions averages at the Bin 5 level. The current standard already allows diesel cars to be sold, and it is illogical to allow air protection standards to be weakened to sell more cars just because they claim to be cleaner. If new diesels are truly cleaner then they should have no trouble meeting current emissions standards.

European Tax Policy Favors Diesels, Resulting in Dirtier Cars

Europeans have increasingly turned to diesel fuel because of preferential tax treatment for diesel vehicles—and diesel cars now comprise almost one-third of the market. These tax policies have been driven by heavy lobbying by the trucking industry, not by a responsible approach to environmental and energy policy.

Diesel fuel is cheaper because it is exempt from many European taxes that have artificially elevated gasoline costs by as much as 86 percent. Thus, a gallon of unleaded gasoline in France costs an average of \$3.66 as opposed to \$2.75 for a gallon of diesel. In Germany, a gallon of gas costs \$3.42 compared to \$2.25 for diesel as a result of higher taxes.

Europe's diesel cars continue to be dirtier than gasoline-powered American cars, because of weaker European Union emission standards. New European standards (effective in 2008) will still allow five times as much particulate matter — and eight times as much NOx — as American standards will allow at that time.

Conclusion

S. 517 will increase corporate average fuel economy to 35 miles-per-gallon by 2013—the single biggest step towards U.S. energy security and decreased dependence on Middle Eastern oil. Achieving this goal is possible without compromising the health of millions of Americans by weakening or delaying the Tier 2 emission standards for diesel vehicles. If the new diesels are truly cleaner, they should have no trouble meeting the same standards as gasoline-powered vehicles.

NRDC strongly urges Congress to oppose any S. 517 amendments that would weaken or delay the Tier 2 emission standards.