

OTC Reiterates Call For EPA To Craft Stricter Heavy-Duty Vehicle NOx Rule

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SARATOGA SPRINGS, NY -- The Ozone Transport Commission (OTC) of Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states is reiterating its call for EPA to issue stricter limits on ozone-forming nitrogen oxides (NOx) emissions from heavy-duty trucks, as the region searches for more ways to meet the agency's tough 2015 federal ozone limit.

At its June 6 spring meeting in Saratoga Springs, NY, OTC issued a formal statement calling on EPA to revise its rules governing NOx emissions from trucks, in order to help states meet the 2015 national ambient air quality standard (NAAQS) of 70 parts per billion (ppb). Many areas in the region “are expected to be in nonattainment for the 2015 health-based standard” of 70 ppb “and face continued challenges meeting the 2008 health-based standard” of 75 ppb.

In its statement, OTC calls on EPA to “assist the states by implementing emission reduction programs to reduce NOx emissions from high priority mobile sources,” listing heavy-duty trucks and also locomotive engines as targets for tougher regulation. Heavy-duty trucks are already the largest source type contributing to NOx emissions in the OTC area, according to EPA's 2011 emissions inventory, and by 2018 locomotive engines will be the fourth-largest emitter, OTC says.

“These two categories have some of the greatest potential for reductions of NOx emissions moving forward, yet federal emission standards for heavy-duty onroad vehicles have not been tightened since 2000 and locomotive engines since 2008,” OTC says. States are largely prohibited under the Clean Air Act from regulating mobile sources, although California can ask for a waiver from EPA to set stricter standards than the federal government. If the agency approves a waiver request, other states can then adopt California's mobile source rules.

California is already pursuing updated heavy-duty NOx standards, and OTC notes that Southern California air regulators petitioned EPA in 2016 calling for updated federal standards. Eight OTC member states have since signed the petition, arguing that stricter NOx limits would help them meet the 70 ppb ozone standard -- although EPA recently announced it will delay by one year issuing designations for whether areas are meeting the limit.

Further, the California Air Resources Board, the state's air regulator, in April petitioned EPA to issue updated locomotive emission standards that would bring them into line with existing heavy-duty truck standards.

NOx Standards

However, whether the Trump EPA will look favorably on these requests is highly uncertain, despite assurances by the agency toward the end of President Barack Obama's term that it will move toward rulemaking on heavy-duty NOx. [EPA in a Dec. 20 memo](#) formally agreed to write a rule to tighten NOx standards for heavy-duty engines and trucks that would take effect with the 2024 model year, but did not commit to specific emissions limits.

Staff with EPA's Office of Transportation and Air Quality (OTAQ) have recently indicated that they so far lack direction on the issue from EPA's new political leadership. To date, no political appointee has been nominated to head the agency's air office. OTAQ head Chris Grundler said at a recent Clean Air Act Advisory Committee mobile sources technical review committee meeting that locomotives regulation remains a low priority.

However, OTAQ staffer Lee Cook at the OTC meeting said that with respect to heavy-duty NOx rules, "one could certainly look at the timetable" of when heavy-duty NOx standards were last tightened, "and say it is time to take another look."

EPA is now thinking about how to comply with President Donald Trump's executive orders aimed at reducing regulations and streamlining compliance with environmental and other rules for industry, and "these standards have the potential to be a 'win-win,'" for the environment and industry, with a streamlining effect, Cook said.

According to [a presentation](#) to the meeting by Massachusetts air regulator Christine Kirby, the current research available to OTC shows that a while a standard of 0.04 grams of NOx per brake-horsepower hour (g/bhp) "appears to be achievable," 0.02g/bhp "needs more research." The latter level is the limit sought by California regulators, who plan to approve their own standards in 2019.

Trucking Emissions

Meanwhile, OTC continues to investigate steps its member states can take to reduce truck NOx emissions, including boosting electrification of truck stops and other measures to reduce engine idling.

For example, Kirby said OTC is examining the feasibility of reducing idling by "reefer" trucks that carry refrigerated food, by using electrified trucks.

OTC's mobile sources committee is drafting recommendations on truck-stop electrification, Kirby said, including: filling in gaps along major transportation

corridors and requiring new truck stops to electrify through regulation; enforcing electric only use at electrified spaces; introducing a system to reserve electric spaces for specific trucks; and requiring gas cards be accepted at electrification stops.

The panel may not, however, proceed with recommendations on idling of locomotives and ships due to perceived technical and legal difficulties, Kirby said. Massachusetts and Rhode Island currently have locomotive idling rules, but Delaware's attempt to introduce them has run into a legal challenge by the federal Surface Transportation Board, which believes the state's effort to be preempted by federal law.

Also, OTC is looking further into possible measures to improve heavy-duty truck inspection and maintenance programs, Kirby said. -- *Stuart Parker*
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