

Report Analyzes Construction Pollution Impact in California

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In California, pollution from construction equipment in 2005 was responsible for an estimated 1,132 premature deaths, nearly 183,000 lost work days, 1,086 hospitalizations, and \$9.1 billion dollars in annual costs, according to a new report from the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS). Nine out of every ten construction-related health effects in California have occurred in the state's five most populated air basins.

“Construction pollution is taking a heavy toll on the health of all Californians,” said Don Anair, author of the report and a Clean Vehicles Engineer in UCS's Berkeley, California office. “Construction equipment being used to build our hospitals shouldn't be responsible for filling them up.”

The report, *Digging up Trouble: the Health Risks of Construction Pollution in California*, is the first to quantify the consequences of construction pollution on California's health and economy. The methodology, based on established government methods, is conservative and does not represent all potential damage associated with diesel pollution.

The study includes regional analyses of Construction Risk Zones in the five areas most affected by construction pollution. UCS researchers combined city population densities with a statewide database of construction permits to identify the Risk Zones, areas where the presence of construction activity significantly raises the risk of exposure to pollution.

Lagging engine standards and long equipment life make construction equipment one of the largest sources of diesel pollution in the state. Today, the average excavator emits in one hour as much particle matter as a new big rig tractor-trailer traveling 1,100 miles. The Environmental Protection Agency adopted emissions standards for new engines in 2004, but benefits from federal regulations will not be fully realized until some time after 2030 because construction equipment lasts for decades.

Phasing out the oldest, most polluting equipment, installing new engines and retrofitting other engines with clean technologies could significantly reduce diesel emissions. California's Air Resources Board is developing a regulatory measure to cut diesel emissions from existing construction equipment, but the construction industry is resisting such rules.

“Reducing diesel engine pollution is one of the most cost-effective strategies for cleaning up the air, with benefits outweighing the costs by a factor of ten-to-one” Anair said. “But equipment owners need a push to start investing in clean, affordable technology available today to reduce costly construction pollution.”

Source: Union of Concerned Scientists

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