

Inside Cal/EPA

*An exclusive weekly report on environmental legislation, regulation and litigation
from the publishers of Inside EPA*

Vol. 30, No. 42 — October 25, 2019

Environmentalists Ramp Up Press On CARB To Strengthen ZEV Truck Rule

Posted October 23, 2019

Environmental, health and labor groups are ramping up pressure on the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to strengthen its proposed medium- and heavy-duty truck zero-emission vehicle (ZEV) sales mandate, charging the current plan will not cut enough conventional pollutants and greenhouse gases and that board staff is vastly underestimating the market for advanced technologies.

“We continue to believe that the rule needs to be stronger not only to match what is feasible but also what is needed to protect freight-impacted communities,” says an attorney with one of the environmental groups. “With announcements like Amazon’s commitment to put 100,000 zero-emission trucks in its fleet by 2024, we don’t think there is any real dispute that higher targets are achievable. We hope that the board will direct staff to revise the rule before it is finally approved next year.”

CARB on Oct. 22 released its proposed “Advanced Clean Trucks Regulation” and accompanying draft environmental analysis for a 45-day public comment period that ends Dec. 9. CARB members will initially consider the regulation at a Dec. 12 meeting; however, a final vote will not occur until a second hearing in mid-2020, officials have said.

The proposal is very similar to an earlier draft discussed during an Aug. 21 public workshop, at which CARB staff resisted a coordinated push by environmental and equity groups to strengthen the rules requiring truck manufacturers to sell an increasing percentage of ZEVs between 2024 and 2030.

CARB staff first laid out the proposed manufacturer ZEV sales requirement for model years 2024-30 at a June workshop, along with a set of truck fleet reporting rules that will inform the development of a separate regulation scheduled to be adopted in 2022 that will require fleet owners to purchase a certain percentage of ZEV trucks.

The two-pronged regulatory approach aims to expand the ZEV truck market to meet the state’s air quality and GHG targets; accelerate development of a self-sustaining ZEV market; maximize the use of ZEVs where suitable; match ZEV availability with individual fleet operational needs; provide benefits in disadvantaged communities; expand infrastructure availability to enable new markets; and ensure a level playing field between fleet operators, according to staff.

The proposal features a phased-in ZEV sales mandate between 2024 and 2030 for different types and sizes of medium- and heavy-duty vehicles. For example, in 2024, 3 percent of Class 2B-3 vehicles offered for sale must be ZEVs, while 7 percent of Class 4-8 trucks must be ZEVs.

Class 2B-3 vehicles include commercial vans and pickup trucks with an 8,501 to 14,000-pound gross vehicle weight rating. However, CARB staff is proposing to exempt pickups in this category from the sales mandate until 2027.

Class 4-8 includes vocational trucks that are more than 14,000 pounds. The mandate would require steadily increasing percentages of vehicles to be ZEVs over the following six years, such as 11 percent of Class 2B-3 vehicles in 2028 and 24 percent of Class 4-8 vehicles in 2028. Those percentages rise to 15 percent and 50 percent by 2030 for the categories, respectively.

The staff’s original June proposal would have exempted the largest trucks — Class 7-8 tractors over 26,000 pounds — from any sales mandates until 2027. At that point, 9 percent of those vehicles would have to be ZEVs, ramping up 2 percentage points a year until 15 percent ZEVs would be required in 2030.

However, CARB staff revised its proposal to strengthen the rule by requiring 3 percent ZEVs in the Class 7-8 category beginning in 2024, rising to 5 percent in 2025 and 7 percent in 2026, according to a workshop presentation. The trajectory would then follow the original proposal from 2027 to 2030.

California Needs ‘Stronger Rule’

But the coalition of environmental, equity, health and labor groups — including Earthjustice, Sierra Club California, the Natural Resources Defense Council, Union of Concerned Scientists, Communities for a Better Environment, and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers — contends that much more aggressive targets are achievable.

In an Oct. 15 letter, the coalition urges CARB staff to increase the overall mandates to ensure that by 2030 no less than 15 percent of medium- and heavy-duty trucks on the road are zero-emitting; include Class 2b pickup trucks in the mandates beginning in 2024; outline CARB’s longer-term objectives for achieving 100 percent zero-emission trucks in various categories, and explain how this phase of the rule is consistent with those objectives and attaining federal and state air quality and GHG objectives; and commit to adopt corresponding fleet purchase requirements in 2021.

“We know that California needs the emission reductions that would be provided by a stronger rule to meet air quality standards and greenhouse gas reduction goals,” the letter says. “Disadvantaged communities across California are disproportionately harmed by air pollution from the trucks covered by this rule. The health benefits from a stronger rule are undeniable and long overdue.”

The environmental attorney estimates that CARB’s proposal would put approximately 75,000 zero-emission trucks on the road by 2030, “which is about 4% of the 1.9 million trucks that will be operating in California. We think the target should be closer to 15%, or somewhere between 250,000 and 300,000 trucks by 2030.”

The groups also argue that recent orders for ZEV trucks by major companies such as Anheuser-Busch, IKEA, PepsiCo and Penske show that advanced technologies for certain vehicles are available at levels to justify higher sales mandates.

They argue the same is true in the Class 7-8 tractor sector, citing a report by Atlas Public Policy saying that as of early 2019, there were more than 16,000 electric trucks on order or pre-order in the U.S., with 14,000 pre-orders of Nikola’s Class 8 tractors.

In addition, “Volvo Trucks North America announced the battery-electric version of their VNR Class 8 regional hauler is slated to go on sale at the end of 2020 while Daimler has already put its electric Freightliner eCascadia Class 8 in service in California,” the letter says.

‘Simply Won’t Buy It’

But truck engine makers paint a different picture of the current and future ZEV truck markets.

During the Aug. 21 CARB staff workshop, Tim Blubaugh, an executive vice president for the Truck & Engine Manufacturers Association, said that a “simple sales mandate we believe would put us in the untenable situation of requiring us to sell products that our customers potentially can’t make money with, and therefore they won’t make the capital investment to purchase it.”

Further, he said, “If the product’s too expensive, if they can’t recharge it cost-effectively, they simply won’t buy it from us.” Blubaugh also questioned why CARB is taking a different approach to regulate an array of medium- and heavy-duty trucks from other narrowly focused, individual board ZEV incentive rules targeting drayage trucks, airport shuttles and transit buses.

“We think such a broad-based rule — that brings in potentially some beachhead markets, but maybe others . . . that might be left for further out in the future — is an inappropriate regulatory mechanism,” he added. — Curt Barry (cbarry@iwpnews.com)