

## **VW SCANDAL:**

### **Trade group ignites debate over 'clean diesel' label**

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A diesel industry trade group wants the proposed \$14.7 billion Volkswagen air pollution settlement with the government to include more incentives for updating diesel fleets. But the request has some environmentalists scratching their heads.

The Diesel Technology Forum submitted comments on the proposed settlement yesterday saying that a \$2.7 billion environmental mitigation trust fund should do more to encourage projects involving "clean diesel" technology.

The group said, "The greater adoption of clean diesel technologies will generate enormous immediate-term [nitrogen oxide] emission reductions." The goal is to replace older diesel engines with newer, cleaner engines.

But environmentalists say the industry's use of the term "clean diesel" is awkward and even tone-deaf given the phrase is associated with Volkswagen's advertisement campaign for the very cars later found to be cheating federal air emissions standards.

"It's pretty surprising that they would call it that," said Dave Cooke, a senior vehicles analyst at the Union of Concerned Scientists, noting the industry could instead advocate for "repowering" or "replacing" old diesel engines.

John German, a senior fellow at the International Council on Clean Transportation, agreed. German's team funded the study that ultimately caught VW vehicles skirting nitrogen oxide pollution regulations.

"I would say to think of a better phrase, or at least give it a rest for a while," he said.

Allen Schaeffer, executive director of the Diesel Technology Forum, defended the term and said his group was not backing away from using it.

"Let's not confuse what Volkswagen did in that case with what this term really means," he said. "The clean diesel they are talking about is the one where you put the word 'clean' in quotes. The one we are talking about is real and is well-documented by the U.S. EPA as working."

Schaeffer said his group, which represents 25 members, including VW, has not had any qualms about using the term "clean diesel" since the scandal broke, and does not want to let one incident rewrite the technology's narrative.

"There are plenty of other manufacturers making clean diesel trucks and cars available today," he said. "VW is just one where the story is well-known, but it was an unfortunate decision made on their part, and it is not a reflection on the whole industry."

### **Settlement details**

Linguistics aside, Schaeffer said his group's position on the settlement — that giving more funding to electrification projects is unrealistic — is perfectly legitimate.

In a world that already relies so heavily on petroleum, he said, it is unwise to set aside more incentives for electric vehicles.

As it is currently proposed, the \$2.7 billion mitigation fund would be distributed to the states, which would then take applications for projects to reduce nitrogen oxide emissions.

Leaders could use the money to foot 75 percent of the bill of a new electric commercial vehicle, but just 25 percent of the cost of a new diesel vehicle.

That disparity is something the diesel industry takes issue with, saying it unfairly and unrealistically promotes electric vehicles.

While an electric vehicle's emissions may be zero, Schaeffer said it can't travel long enough distances between charges to compete with diesel vehicles.

Electrifying would be cumbersome to a government fleet, he said, whereas repowering older trucks with diesel engines built after 2010 could provide real emissions reductions.

"An electric car is not going to be able to do the same amount of work or drive the same number of miles that a newer diesel engine could," he said.

The Diesel Technology Forum is asking EPA to either mandate that the mitigation fund cover the same percentage of costs for electric and diesel projects, or let states decide how much of a project to cover.

"The overarching message here is that there is a long history of the ability of new clean diesel technology to provide proven mitigation of nitrogen oxide emissions, and this settlement is about mitigating the nitrogen oxide emissions from the VW situation," Schaeffer said.

Environmentalists disagree. They say the settlement promotes electric technology that is "actually clean" over vehicles that simply meet emissions standards.

"It makes sense to incentivize technology that is trying to move the industry leaps forward as opposed to steps forward," Cooke said.

German said the phrase "clean diesel" is generally a marketing term meant to show consumers that the technology meets emissions standards.

"When we talk about gasoline vehicles, we don't call them 'clean gas,' we assume that they will meet the standard," he said.

**Dan Becker of the Safe Climate Campaign called the term an oxymoron, even when used to describe legitimate technology.**

**"It is important to make diesels cleaner, but calling relatively dirty trucks clean diesel is a bit like calling Donald Trump a polite gentleman," he said.**

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