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## **'We are accustomed to dastardly disappointment'**

**By: Maxine Joselow**

Surprise: Environmentalists and public health experts are happy with the Trump EPA today.

That's because the agency is poised to take a rare step to strengthen a regulation, after months of rolling back rules or significantly weakening them.

At issue is EPA's expected announcement today about tightening nitrogen oxides (NOx) emissions standards for heavy-duty trucks (Greenwire, Nov. 12).

Flanked by trucking industry executives, acting EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler will roll out the Cleaner Trucks Initiative this afternoon at agency headquarters in Washington.

The initiative is poised to reduce air pollution, as nitrogen oxides react with volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in the presence of sunlight to form ground-level ozone.

It comes after the Trump EPA has launched a whirlwind of actions to rein in regulations. First came the rollback of clean car rules, an aggressive effort to unravel former President Obama's program to reduce tailpipe emissions. Then came the Clean Power Plan replacement, a drastically scaled-back version of Obama's signature initiative for curbing greenhouse gas emissions from the power sector.

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Miles Keogh, executive director of the National Association of Clean Air Agencies, was similarly pleased.

"You've got to commend them for taking a step that's going to improve air quality and protect public health," Keogh said. "It is welcome."

Luke Tonachel, director of clean vehicles and fuels at the Natural Resources Defense Council, struck a note of cautious optimism.

"After nearly two years of taking it easy on polluters, the Trump administration's EPA is proposing its first measure that could limit harmful air pollutants," Tonachel said

"Given its sorry overall record in protecting public health, though, we will be watching closely to make sure it follows through and actually mandates the needed cuts in these smog-forming compounds," he said. "There's ample reason for skepticism."

Some industry representatives are happy too.

"The new Cleaner Trucks Initiative announced today sets the vision for the heavy-duty diesel engines of the future as high-value assets which help achieve our nation's future energy and clean air goals while also expanding economic growth," said Allen Schaeffer, executive director of the Diesel Technology Forum, in a statement.

The Cleaner Trucks Initiative comes after nearly a dozen state and local air agencies petitioned EPA for such a rulemaking around two years ago (E&E News PM, June 3, 2016).

The agencies asked EPA to set regulations aimed at slashing NOx from big trucks to one-tenth of 2016 levels from 0.2 grams per brake horsepower to 0.02 g/bhp.

Still, it remains to be seen how stringent EPA's proposal will be. Wheeler and EPA air chief Bill Wehrum provided few details on a press call with reporters yesterday.

Adriano Martinez, a staff attorney with Earthjustice, said he hopes EPA heeds the petition and sets a new standard of 0.02 g/bhp. That would mirror the voluntary low-NOX standard adopted by the California Air Resources Board.

"The standard that's been floated around a lot out here is the 0.02, and that's the voluntary low-NOx standard that CARB adopted," Martinez said. "We've also been hearing that some of the engines are hitting 0.01, as well. So I think there is even a credible argument that it should be even lower than 0.02."

He added, "In places like the South Coast or the Los Angeles region, we have a lot of trucks operating for very long periods of the day. So we really need a much more strengthened standard to meet clean air goals in California."

Another wrinkle: EPA is still moving forward with a separate rulemaking that could increase NOx emissions from trucks.

The agency is still advancing its proposed repeal of emissions standards for glider kits, or new trucks with refurbished diesel engines. The proposal was listed as a "long-term action" in the administration's fall regulatory plan, meaning that it's still on the table, but not a top agency priority (Greenwire, Oct. 17).

Former EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt initially proposed expanding the glider kit loophole last fall. In doing so, Pruitt contradicted the analysis of EPA's own staff, which found that glider kits emit 43 to 55 times more air pollution than trucks with modern emission controls.

In particular, EPA staff found, gliders spew more NOx and particulates, which are blamed for asthma, lung cancer and premature deaths.

"The administration still has the glider loophole rulemaking out there," said Paul Billings, national senior vice president for public policy with the American Lung Association.

"So they also need to withdraw that proposal, not just from the longer-term agenda," Billings said, adding that "continuing with that glider loophole could undo all of the benefits and then some" of the Cleaner Trucks Initiative.

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