Clean Trucks Means Cleaner Air and Equity for all Coloradans

Introduction

This year, Colorado has a chance to address climate impacts, environmental racism, and historical inequities by enacting safer and more sustainable clean truck rules. Clean delivery trucks, vans and semi trucks mean cleaner air with less greenhouse gas emissions for all Coloradans. This could be the start of a transformative approach to heal disproportionately impacted communities from plumes of chemical cocktails of particulate pollutants. We know that air pollution and climate change are harmful for all of us, but historically, Black and Brown Communities have been targeted to bear the brunt of the impacts for generations, with little to no equity in our health and safety. That is why GreenLatinos, Mi Familia Vota, the Denver NAACP Chapter, Working Families Party and Womxn from the Mountain in Colorado are united in delivering climate and environmental solutions and economic protections to disproportionately impacted communities, including but not limited to: Indigenous communities and urban underserved areas, Commerce City, Elyria Swansea, Five Points, Globeville, Henderson, North Denver, North Park Hill, Aurora, surrounding Adams County, Pueblo, Grand Junction, Colorado Springs, and countless other communities that have seen inhumane and crippling repercussions of pollution.

A pair of rules that Colorado's Air Quality Control Commission (AQCC) is considering would cut emissions from trucks that deliver our groceries, packages and other supplies that travel through disproportionately impacted communities. The Clean Truck rules would reduce adverse health impacts, improve air quality throughout the state, and finally recognize known harms from particulate pollution, especially in areas along major transportation corridors which are disproportionately impacted by truck emissions. This will deliver major public health benefits in the heavily populated zip codes that include north metro Denver, Adams County, and Weld County - these areas suffer from some of the most unhealthy air in the entire U.S.

Diesel Death Zones and Environmental Racism

Currently, disproportionately impacted communities (DICs) of Indigenous, Immigrant, Black and Brown families and children suffer from higher rates of asthma, bronchitis, anemia, low birth rates, premature births, as well as other physical and mental health ailments due to the toxic pollution created along Colorado's congested highways, especially I-70 and its surrounding corridors. Communities located near these transportation arteries, warehouses, and railyards experience the worst impacts from the heavy truck traffic that is exacerbated by idling, slow speeds, and frequent stops and little to no restoration and healthcare access.

These neighborhoods were not chosen by happenstance but made into sacrifice zones by years of marginalization and historical redlining. The development of the I-70 corridor provides a good example of predatory behaviors on DICs. Residential Security Maps (RSMs) were a tool historically used by the Federal Housing Administration to decide which homes got mortgages, and which did not. The RSMs rated neighborhoods from green "desirable", to red "undesirable" in a process known as "redlining." Black and Brown people were segregated out of the desirable White neighborhoods and relegated to the neighborhoods marked in red. The Elyria Swansea neighborhood was redlined in 1938, 23 years before the first segment of I-70 construction within the city of Denver began. If you look at a map of Denver, you can see that I-70 takes a curious jog to the north as it goes through the city. In 1961, the city leaders made a choice. Rather than continuing the path of construction through what is now East Colfax, or creating a beltway around the city limits, city leaders took a shortcut, deviating construction north before continuing east to run through Elyria Swansea. Had they deviated the same distance to the south, the highway would have run through affluent Glendale.

The City of Denver chose to sacrifice the health and safety of Black and Brown children, creating what is now known as the Diesel Death Zone, instead of finding a more equitable solution that would have benefited everyone. Today, these children pay the price with the time that they are not in school and cannot play outside due to the higher frequency of hazardous air days, with their safety as they cross to different parts of town to spend time with friends and family, and in some cases, with their very lives due to asthma, bronchitis, and cancer.

The Colorado Advanced Clean Trucks Rule & Low NOx Heavy-Duty Omnibus Rule

Solutions to these issues are possible but will require real progress by Colorado state leaders and policies. Transitioning the semis and delivery trucks which frequent I-70 to electric engines, and implementing the new standards proposed within the two Clean Truck rules (Advanced Clean Trucks and Low NOx Heavy-Duty Omnibus) will make a difference where change is most desperately needed. These new policies will move us toward eliminating environmental degradation and barriers harming disproportionately impacted communities as well as implementing a fair and just transition towards clean energy, in which Colorado's children can breathe clean air regardless of race or socio-economic background for future generations to come.

Environmental injustice can be prevented by being restorative for future generations to learn from the past mistakes. That is why each of our organizations is committed to the transformative changes necessary to address and eliminate environmental racism for good.

Signatories

Katara Burrola, Mi Familia Vota

Ean Tafoya and Juan Madrid, GreenLatinos

Renee M. Chacon, Womxn From the Mountain

Sondra Young and Jeremiah Ntepp, NAACP Denver

Wendy Howell, Colorado Working Families Party

Bri Morris, Community Organizer