

Where Old Trucks Go to Die

By John Berge

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Q: Where do you find the cleanest trucks in California?

A: The ports of Los Angeles, Long Beach and Oakland

No, it's not a trick question, although it's turned into a bad joke played on the people of California.

Of all the sources of emissions at ports, diesel trucks have garnered the most attention from the local community. This is not surprising since they are the visible source driving down the streets and through the neighborhoods. On top of that, port drayage trucks gained the reputation years ago of being the red headed stepchild of the trucking industry. Despite data showing an average difference in age between a port truck and other trucks in the LA region of only 5 months, port trucks were described as aged and decrepit compared to other on-road trucks and the ports were caricatured as graveyards "where old trucks went to die."

That was then and this is now. Over the last year and a half port trucks and their emissions have become fully regulated. This leads us back to our original question. Instead of being the final resting place for the oldest, dirtiest trucks, the ports can now boast having the cleanest trucks in the state. But this begs the next question, where did all the dirty trucks go? The answer is - nowhere. While a handful of old trucks were scrapped, the majority are still in service throughout California. Although we in the goods movement industry urged the state to adopt one consistent regulation covering all on-road trucks, CARB chose to first regulate the 4 percent of trucks in the state servicing ports and deal with the other 96 percent later.

So we are now left with a fatally flawed regulatory system where the problem has been pushed outside of the terminal gates but still impacts everyone else in California.

If the issue was really about clean trucks, a cleaner environment and improved health, then port communities and environmental advocates would be better served by declaring victory at the ports, where clean truck plans are already achieving emission reductions well ahead of schedule, and instead focus on ensuring that the other 96 percent of trucks catch up. Anything short of that leaves us with an emission reduction shell game.