

Truck pollution deadline extended

But there's a catch: Rig owners must prove they're working diligently to comply

By Alex Breitler, Staff Writer

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Truckers will have more time to comply with major new pollution rules, but they must prove by the end of this month that they're making a good-faith effort to do so.

Wednesday was originally the deadline for many truckers - including thousands in the San Joaquin Valley - to begin upgrading their rigs to emit less harmful diesel pollution.

Officials have expressed concern, however, for the smallest fleets, including businesses comprising just one, two or three trucks. Owners typically lack the financial backing of a large company to pay for new filters that could cost anywhere from \$15,000 to \$20,000.

Now those owners have a little more time. Enforcement of the new law will not begin until July 1 for those who file paperwork by the end of January showing that they've taken certain steps, such as entering into an agreement to have a new filter installed, seeking financing to pay for one, or ordering a replacement truck.

Also, the California Air Resources Board next spring will consider changing the rule in ways that could exempt some lower-mileage vehicles and give trucks operating in some regions of California (but not the Valley) until 2015 to comply.

"We're hearing people and their concerns, and there are plenty," said Karen Caesar, a spokeswoman for the air board.

The rule was adopted in 2008 but was delayed several years because of the recession. Under the rule, most heavy trucks in the state must install soot filters or upgrade to newer models by this year. By 2016 nearly all trucks will have been required to do so.

In November, the air board reported that an estimated 20,000 trucks were still in need of filters, most of those trucks belonging to smaller fleets. Air pollution officials in the Valley expressed concern that compliance rates would be low and made available \$7 million to help truckers replace their rigs entirely.

Michael Shaw, a spokesman for the California Trucking Association, said this week that the association believes the state can still do more to help small-fleet owners comply - to "ensure that all trucking companies are playing by the same rules."