

Smoky old diesels en route to ban



Some 80 percent of the roadside air pollution comes from diesel commercial vehicles. SINGTAO

Winnie Chong and Choya Choy

Older diesel vehicles will be banned from Hong Kong roads under a "carrot and stick" plan, environment minister Wong Kam-sing said yesterday.

Wong's comments came a day after Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying said the government would consider "tighter control over and the eventual phasing out of old buses and commercial vehicles."

It also came as the roadside air pollution index topped 130 in Central, prompting health warnings for a ninth day running.

Wong noted that the mainland has set a deadline for discontinuing licenses for commercial diesel vehicles that are 15 years old.

"We can have a carrot and stick to guarantee that we would achieve the air quality by a certain time, say we are setting a target for 2015, so that

we have to have an effective measure to phase out those old diesel commercial vehicles," he said.

Wong said 80 percent of roadside air pollution comes from diesel commercial vehicles.

Undersecretary for the Environment Christine Loh Kung-wai said the government is thinking of "specific formulas" for franchised buses, non-franchised buses, school buses, tourist buses and trucks that use diesel.

The proposals could be ready next month, she said, adding that setting age limits for such vehicles will be legislated.

Hong Kong Guangdong Transportation Association secretary Tse Long said the government should cover at least one-third of the cost of upgrading their fleets and pay for the entire cost of discarding the old trucks.

"It should be same as the practice for poultry vendors who surrender their licenses," he said.

Kowloon Truck Merchants Association chairman Leung Kun-kuen said such a move would force truck drivers out of work and operators to close down as they would not be able to afford HK\$700,000 to HK\$800,000 to buy new vehicles.

Government figures show there are about 140,000 commercial diesel vehicles, which account for 20 percent of road traffic.

There are more than 30,000 trucks aged 15 years old, comprising about 30 percent of existing trucks.

Friends of the Earth senior environmental affairs manager Melonie Chau Yuet-cheung said: "This measure certainly will help improve the air quality."

Clean Air Network campaign manager Pat Fung Kin-wai hoped the government will set a concrete timetable and provide a scrapping incentive for vehicle owners to replace their cars. A truck operators' alliance will meet officials next week. winnie.chong@singtaonews.com

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