



NEWS RELEASE

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Riding School Buses Exposes Children to Cancer-Causing Toxins, Groups Warn

San Francisco, CA— Two environmental justice groups filed suit today to protect school children from diesel engine exhaust from school buses. Our Children's Earth Foundation (OCE) and Environmental Law Foundation (ELF) filed an action in San Francisco Superior Court against Laidlaw Transit Inc. (Laidlaw). The lawsuit is filed under California's Proposition 65 (the Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986), and claims that Laidlaw is exposing school children who ride Laidlaw school buses to cancer-causing diesel engine exhaust without a warning. The groups are seeking a court order to provide warnings about the diesel engine exhaust by the time the next school year starts.

ELF and OCE, represented by Adams Broadwell Joseph & Cardozo, allege that Laidlaw's diesel school buses, used by school districts throughout California, emit high levels of diesel engine exhaust, a complex mixture of gases and fine particles. Diesel engine exhaust was listed by Governor Deukmejian in October 1990 as a chemical known to the State of California to cause cancer.

The environmental groups claim that Laidlaw is violating Proposition 65 because it is exposing public school children who ride its buses to chemicals known to cause cancer without first giving a "clear and reasonable warning" about the hazardous health consequences associated with exposure to diesel engine exhaust. Diesel engine exhaust particulate is considered by public health officials to be a toxic air contaminant and a major source of cancer risk. In addition to cancer, evidence establishes that diesel engine exhaust can exacerbate asthma and other respiratory illnesses.

Recent studies by researchers at the University of California Los Angeles, the California Air Resources Board and others have found:

* For identification purposes only.

- Children riding school buses can be exposed to 4 to 10 times higher levels of diesel engine exhaust than background levels.
- A child riding inside a diesel school bus may be exposed to as much as 4 times the level of toxic diesel engine exhaust as someone riding in a car along the same route.
- Exposure to diesel engine exhaust can pose a cancer risk to children that is 23 to 46 times higher than the risk level considered “significant” under federal law.
- The average diesel bus emits nearly twice as much pollution per mile as a big rig truck.
- A significant amount of the pollution on a school bus is “self-pollution” from the bus’ own exhaust.
- Children are especially vulnerable to the hazardous health consequences from diesel engine exhaust because their immune systems are not fully developed and they inhale more air than adults every day, based on a comparison of body weight.
- About seventy percent (70%) of the cancer risk that the average Californian faces from breathing toxic air pollutants stems from diesel exhaust particles.
- Diesel exhaust particles are small enough (about one-seventh the width of a human hair) to be inhaled deep into the lungs, and up to 85% of fine particles remain in the lungs 24 hours after initial exposure.

“Our children are being exposed to harmful, cancer-causing toxins every day when they innocently step on the bus to ride to school.” said Tiffany Schauer, Executive Director of Our Children’s Earth. “Our children should not have to wear protective gear to get to school.”

San Francisco Unified School District recently required Laidlaw to purchase 50 new diesel school buses for use in its 200-bus San Francisco fleet. ELF called this, “only a temporary step in the right direction, not a long-term solution. As long as any school buses in California spew diesel engine exhaust on our kids, parents and students have the right to know. The good news is much safer alternatives already exist. We just need to commit ourselves to protecting our kids.”

Commissioner Eric Mar of the San Francisco School Board stated, “the School Board faces many challenges, but nothing is more important than the health of our students. Our students and their parents at least have a right to know that they are being exposed to chemicals that the State has identified as carcinogens. Armed with this information, parents and children will demand a cleaner environment.”

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