EPA, state spend stimulus money on cleaner diesel retrofits

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OregonianA TriMet bus in traffic. Federal stimulus money will help pay for environmental retrofits to TriMet buses and vehicles in city and county fleets. The <u>U.S. Environmental Protection Agency</u> has awarded \$1.73 million to Oregon for retrofit heavy duty diesel engines in local government fleets, buses and off-road construction equipment.

The money comes from the federal stimulus bill, known as the <u>American Reinvestment and Recovery Act.</u>

Michelle Pirzadeh, EPA's acting regional administrator, came to Portland to make the announcement Tuesday, saying the projects will improve public health and help stimulate the green technology sector of Oregon's economy.

"These cost-effective projects will help Oregon speed its journey to economic recovery," Pirzadeh said. "This funding will bolster the state's economy and create new, green jobs that will improve air quality in Oregon."

Diesel exhaust is among the top air toxics in Oregon, linked to asthma, cancer and regional haze. EPA and <u>Oregon Department of Environmental Quality</u> officials estimate that the retrofits will reduce diesel particulate matter emissions by 25 percent or more per vehicle.

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The money will pay for retrofits to 29 TriMet buses, and fleet vehicles owned by the cities of Lake Oswego and Milwaukie and Lane and Washington counties.

The money must be spent by September 2010, as part of Congressional efforts to ensure that stimulus money is spent quickly to create jobs. The \$1.73 million to be spent in the next 18 months is a large sum compared with the \$1.25 million state DEQ officials had in the last two-year state budget cycle, said Kevin Downing, coordinator of DEQ's clean diesel program.

"It's more money than we've had before to directly work with," Downing said. A separate \$498,726 grant by the EPA will cover most of an Oregon Department of Environmental Quality project that will retrofit City of Portland and Multnomah County fleet vehicles.

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