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Saving Lives in a Post 9/11 Era and Preserving Economic Stability of California's Ports

Why Governor Schwarzenegger Should Sign SB 927

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President

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The governor has a rare opportunity to sign **Senate Bill 927** that could both save lives and invest in a strong economic future for California by providing necessary funding to improve our largest ports.

The ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach are the busiest in the nation. But the tremendous trade growth at the ports comes at a terrible cost: it is the largest single source of toxic diesel pollution in the greater Los Angeles region.

Diesel exhaust is particularly deadly and is known to cause cancer. A landmark study conducted by the South Coast Air Quality Management District concluded that over 70% of the cancer risk from air pollution in the L.A. area is attributable to diesel engine exhaust.

The California Air Resources Board also found that emissions from ports and goods movement activities cause 2,400 premature deaths and over 1 million school absences in the state every year.

Already, the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach place 40,000 diesel trucks on the road every day. This figure will increase dramatically, as trade is expected to triple over the next 20 years. The diesel-belching trucks and trains that carry the containers from the ports, travel to all corners of the state, delivering both goods and toxic diesel emissions to all regions.

SB 927 (authored by State Senator Alan Lowenthal) calls for a very modest \$30 to be collected from every twenty-foot equivalent unit or TEU of shipping containers that enter the ports and divide the funds collected into thirds for:

- New effective technologies to reduce port air pollution,
- Specific transportation needs, such as improving rail systems, and,
- Specific security enhancement needs, such as container screening.

SB 927 will also address critical post-9/11 security concerns. National experts have described the nation's ports as a "house of cards" that could easily be toppled by a "dirty" bomb or a nuclear weapon smuggled inside a shipping container. Some 98 percent of the millions of cargo containers that enter U.S. ports are never inspected.

Last month, the **Rand Corporation released a report** that detailed how a nuclear explosion at the Port of Long Beach could kill 60,000 people immediately, expose 150,000 more to radiation and cause 10 times more economic loss than the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Also in June, a Public Policy Institute of California report, **Protecting the Nation's Seaports: Balancing Security and Cost**, found that "the federal government has helped finance port security improvements through a grant program, but California's share of these grants is far below its share of containerized trade, or even overall maritime trade."



These examples highlight why SB 927 is so essential to our state's economic security: it will create a continuous revenue stream to fund port security, clean the air and improve rail systems. A one-time bond (which also puts the burden on the taxpayer and not the polluter) is not enough. And periodic grants from the federal government are not adequate.

The container fee is responsible and modest. A new expert study showed that a container fee at the ports of L.A./Long Beach would result in a negligible ship traffic diversion of less than 1.5 percent. And the \$30 would increase total ship voyage costs to the L.A./Long Beach port complex by only 1.5-2.5 percent on average.

For the consumer, this means a pair of shoes imported from Asia will cost half a penny more. And a new DVD player might have a penny or two added to its price tag.

For Californians - the thousands who have written, called and rallied to support this critical legislation - it is a matter of life and death. They know that they may pay the ultimate price if this bill does not become law - their health and security are at stake.

I urge Governor Schwarzenegger to sign SB 927 to invest in California's future by saving lives and preserving economic stability at the ports.

*Tim Carmichael is president and chief executive officer of the **Coalition for Clean Air**, a non-profit environmental advocacy organization dedicated to restoring clean, healthful air to all California residents. As Executive Director, he develops and oversees the organization's strategy for reducing air pollution in California.*



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