Gov. Rick Perry's Remarks Regarding The Texas Emissions Reduction Plan

*Note - Gov. Perry frequently departs from prepared remarks.

Tuesday, July 27, 2004 • Houston, Texas

Good afternoon. I am here today with Commissioner Ralph Marquez of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Harris County Judge Robert Eckels, and the employees of Buffalo Marine Service, including CEO Patrick Studdert, to announce funding for an important private-public partnership to clean the air.

We know that in this part of the state a major source of air pollution comes from the vehicles we operate: the cars we drive to work and school, and the larger on-road and off-road equipment businesses use like bulldozers, front end loaders, backhoes, and earth movers. It also comes from diesel engines on trains, buses, and marine vehicles. These older engines produce more nitrogen oxides which rise into the air, mix with other compounds, and rapidly form ground-level ozone. That ozone makes it difficult to breathe, especially for those segments of the community that are sensitive to air pollution, those with asthma, and other respiratory ailments, the elderly and young children.

Today the State of Texas is allocating $80 million in grants under the Texas Emissions Reduction Plan to reduce nitrogen oxide emissions mostly from internal combustion engines commonly used by heavy construction equipment, large trucks, locomotives, tugboats and pushboats. Hundreds of private sector companies in areas of the state designated out of compliance, or near-non compliance with clean air standards, have applied for these grants, and agreed to replace or retrofit dirtier engines with cleaner burning versions. This program offers state funds to help replace those older engines with cleaner burning ones that produce less pollution. Cumulatively, this program will remove 13,000 tons of Nitrogen Oxide from the air, the equivalent of removing 182,000 cars from our roads each day.

This unique commitment by the state, working in conjunction with the private sector, shows we are not only talking about clean air, we’re investing in it. Our plans to clean the air in Houston, Dallas/Fort Worth and other areas of the state with high emissions are critical to maintaining federal funding for roads, and more importantly, they are critical to protecting the public health.

Today’s announcement comes just weeks after the Environmental Protection Agency informed us of the good news that Texas now meets federal standards for fine particulate matter, the top environmental cause of childhood asthma. I am proud that we have reduced fine particulate pollution, passed tougher standards for older industrial plants,
created some of the most aggressive renewable energy requirements in the nation for power producers, and partnered with members of the private sector to reduce emissions without hurting jobs. And I want Texans to know the $80 million we are spending to reduce pollution is just a down payment.

Because of legislation authored by Representative Bonnen, we have secured funding for this program at a rate of more than $100 million a year through 2008. Today’s grants will mean $36 million for employers and entities in the Houston-Galveston area, $30 million for their counterparts in Dallas/Fort Worth, and $15 million for clean air participants in other parts of the state. This is a novel approach to clean air that is not driven by mandates, but partnerships, with the private sector.

In cities like Houston, we still have a long way to go in cleaning the air. But the people of Houston can know progress is being made. Compared to this time last year for Houston, we have experienced a 33 percent reduction in the number of ozone exceedances measured by the one hour standard. Certainly Mother Nature has done her part with cooler weather, but I believe the measures we have taken to clean the air have helped too.

With tighter controls on old, industrial polluters, new, cleaner sources of energy being developed and required, and investments in cleaner engines, we are making an aggressive effort to clean the air and protect the public health to the benefit of millions of Texans.

To discuss this unique commitment is TCEQ Commissioner Ralph Marquez.

(after all speakers are done:)

Before we take questions from members of the media, I would like to present a symbolic check in the amount of one million 892 thousand dollars to Patrick Studdert with Buffalo Marine to assist them in converting to cleaner burning engines to help clean the air.)