

## Diesel emission fines generated in San Gabriel Valley help fund Oakland-based program

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### Photo Gallery



### California Air Resources Board

(Correspondent photos by  
Dean Coppola)

*When area trash hauler Athens was fined by the California Air resources board, a portion of the money went to a community college district in Oakland. Apparently all CARB fines direct a portion of money to the tiny district.*

When Industry-based Athens Services pays a recent fine for trash trucks that violated state diesel emissions laws, some of the money will help fund an Oakland-based community college program.

Along with being required to dole out \$200,000 in penalties to the California Air Resources Board - the agency that cited the Industry-based trash hauler - Athens must send a \$33,750 check to the Peralta Community College District in Oakland.

"I don't know how it was that (Peralta) got on somebody's list to get all that money, but it's a lot of money ... you would hope some school locally would have a program and get some of that money," said Athens spokesman Mike Lewis.

When a company violates an environmental regulation and is forced to pay penalties, a portion of the fine is often used to fund programs aimed at addressing the larger environmental problem, explained Paul Jacobs, chief of enforcement for mobile sources for the Air Resources Board.

"We want to have the violator put their money directly back into environmental programs to fix things," Jacobs said.

So when Athens and other diesel emission violators pay penalties, a portion - usually 12.5 percent - goes to Peralta Community College to fund diesel and truck mechanics programs there and can be distributed to one of four other colleges across the state, including Los Angeles Trade Tech College.

Peralta officials are responsible for equally dividing the fine among the five schools with diesel mechanics programs. But first, the Oakland college takes 5percent off the top for its administrative troubles, Jacobs said.

Last year, companies across the state paid a total of \$492,000 in fines to Peralta. After the Peralta Community College Foundation took in roughly \$117,600 for its classes and administrative expenses, it

gave each of the other four schools just over \$93,000 each.

The schools use the funds to train mechanics and technicians on how to maintain diesel engines and check to see if they are polluting. They teach specific courses necessary for company technicians to comply with emissions regulations.

"The Air Resources Board wants to re-educate these companies, so they don't make the same mistakes over again," said Mike Robertson, an instructor at Peralta's Alameda College diesel mechanics program.

Michael Cavanaugh, instructor at LA Trade Tech's diesel mechanics program, said the fines help the school "tremendously."

"It's a small percentage of the total fine but it's better than nothing," he said. "Peralta has been very good about watching over the funds and divvying them up for us."

The money must specifically be used for diesel technology programs, not for school administration or repaving driveways, Cavanaugh said.

State budget cuts have hit community college programs hard, and the diesel programs are no exception, Cavanaugh said. They have had to cut classes.

"We don't know what we would do without (the ARB fines)," he said.

The program also relies on federal and state grants and industry donations.

"We are on a starvation diet. And because we are vocational, it costs a lot of money to run these programs, keep up this equipment," Cavanaugh said.

It is an investment that pays off right away, though, he added.

"These kids can go out when they are done and get a job right away and start paying taxes. They don't need more school," he said.

Though Robertson said the Alameda program also relies on the ARB fines, he would prefer to not receive them.

"The truth is, we are working very hard not to get any money. We don't want the companies violating standards and paying fines. We want them hiring people and paying wages," Robertson said.

Athens was cited last week for failing to properly inspect its diesel vehicles from 2004 to 2006 and failing to install required emission-reducing devices in some of its trucks.

Spokesman Lewis said the company was not aware of changes to inspection regulations made in 2004, which put them in violation for two years. And he said the equipment that lacked proper devices came from other companies Athens acquired.

"They did a very poor job of outreach," Lewis said.

Jacobs said that is no excuse.

"These guys know about (the regulations). They are part of trade associations where it is discussed, but they are taking the chance that they're not going to get caught," he said.

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