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zevfleet@arb.ca.gov

June 12, 2025

Ms. Liane Randolph, Chair
California Air Resources Board
Sacramento, CA 95812-0100

Subject: Comments on Proposed Amendments to the Advanced Clean Fleets Regulation (AB 1594)

Dear Chair Randolph,

The Orange County Water District (OCWD) appreciates the California Air Resources Board's (CARB) decision to revisit the Advanced Clean Fleets (ACF) regulation under the AB 1594 process. As a public agency responsible for managing the region's groundwater resources and ensuring reliable drinking water for over 2.5 million residents, OCWD recognizes the importance of transitioning to cleaner fleet technologies. At the same time, we urge CARB to incorporate greater flexibility for public agency fleets whose operations are essential to public health, safety, and emergency response. Efforts to reduce emissions must be balanced with the operational realities faced by water and wastewater agencies.

1. Regulation must accommodate the operational responsibilities of public agency utilities. The AB 1594 process must acknowledge the critical role public utilities play in emergency preparedness and response. Our fleet includes specialized medium- and heavy-duty vehicles that are indispensable for maintaining infrastructure, supporting mutual aid efforts, responding to disasters, and providing long-term water supplies to our service area. The current ACF framework mandates exclusive adoption of zero-emission vehicles (ZEVs) but offers limited flexibility through exemptions that often fail to reflect the full scope of utility operations. This highlights a need to reassess the exemption process to ensure it is accessible, transparent, and functional. A responsive and adaptive framework is key to ensuring public utilities can continue delivering uninterrupted service.

2. Implementation should reflect market availability and cost realities. As the ACF progresses, CARB should account for the limited availability and higher costs of ZEVs suitable for public utility operations. The removal of enforcement authority over private fleets has shifted market dynamics, resulting in narrower availability and inflated costs for public agencies. Even when ZEV alternatives are available, they often fall short in performance or operational range compared to traditional internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles. This performance gap, combined with growing uncertainties around federal EV policies, puts additional strain on already tight agency budgets. Without thoughtful implementation and support, these challenges could impair agencies' ability to meet public service obligations.

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3. Vehicle availability may rely on misleading manufacturer data, leaving public agencies potentially unable to obtain exemptions. OCWD is concerned with how CARB determines whether a vehicle is “available” under the ACF regulation. Exemption requests may be denied based on CARB’s Certified ZEV list, which lacks key operational details, especially body configurations essential for water and wastewater agencies. For instance, a listed cab-and-chassis doesn’t confirm whether it can be built out as a water truck, dump truck, or other utility-specific vehicle. Without this information, the list may suggest broader availability than exists.

We’re also concerned that some entries are based on marketing claims or plans, not commercially available vehicles. This creates uncertainty and puts agencies in a difficult position when requesting exemptions. To address this, CARB should require manufacturers to submit verified data and CARB should include this data in its public facing ZEV list. Data should include specifications, delivery timelines, production status, and available configurations. Without stronger requirements, the list risks being more promotional than practical, potentially blocking justified exemptions.

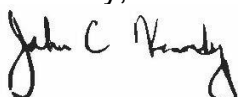
Another challenge with the exemption process is that it requires vehicle manufacturers to formally state they cannot provide a suitable ZEV. However, manufacturers are likely unwilling to make such declarations, as doing so could have an impact on their market perception or future sales prospects. This reluctance puts public agencies in a difficult position where they are unable to secure exemptions because manufacturers may be hesitant to confirm the unavailability of vehicles, even when no viable options exist.

Conclusion. To implement the ACF regulation effectively, CARB must provide greater flexibility for public utilities whose specialized fleets are essential for emergency response and critical operations. The current exemption process is too limited, and available ZEV options often fall short in cost, performance, and practicality which jeopardize service reliability.

CARB should improve its vehicle availability determinations by requiring verified manufacturer data, including body configurations, production status, and delivery timelines. The exemption process must also move away from relying on manufacturer declarations, which are often withheld. Without these changes, utilities may be unfairly denied exemptions despite the lack of viable alternatives.

Should you have any questions or wish to discuss these comments further, please contact Ben Smith, Director of Recharge and Wetland Operations at (714) 378-3211 or bsmith@ocwd.com.

Sincerely,



John Kennedy
General Manager