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Metra installs new air filters in rail cars to reduce harmful diesel soot

Agency confirms problem through own tests after Tribune probe brought it to light

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By **Michael Hawthorne**, Chicago Tribune reporter

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Metra began the year publicly downplaying air pollution from its aging diesel engines, but by fall it had upgraded all of its passenger coaches to make them safer for commuters.

Responding to a Tribune investigation, the rail service conducted its own testing and found high levels of lung- and heart-damaging diesel soot inside its stainless-steel cars.

Levels were significantly higher during outbound trips, largely because diesel pollution from idling locomotives collects inside the open cars before departure from Union Station, LaSalle Street Station and the Ogilvie Transportation Center. Diesel exhaust also is sucked into the cars as locomotives pull outbound trains toward the suburbs.

Maps

210 S Canal St, Chicago, IL 60606, USA

500 W Madison St, Chicago, IL 60661, USA

414 S LaSalle St, Chicago, IL 60605, USA

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Metra found that the more efficient air filters it installed systemwide reduce the average amount of soot by up to 75 percent. It also has secured federal grants for equipment that automatically shuts down the engines when they arrive at the downtown stations.

The changes were prompted by a Tribune investigation that revealed the air inside Metra cars was significantly dirtier than normal pollution levels on city streets.

Researchers estimate that more than half of people's daily exposure to diesel pollution comes during their commute. More than 245,000 commuters move through Chicago's three downtown stations every weekday.