

The Truck Stops Here - for Urea refilling

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Implications

Large fleet customers are making preliminary 2010 engine decisions now; urea infrastructure concerns must be addressed for SCR engines to win widespread adoption.

Analysis

Early adopters of SCR emissions technology for 2010 engines have been faced with uncertainty in the emerging plans for urea refilling infrastructure. Engine OEMs have helped by designing on-board storage capacities to allow >2000 miles between refills but concrete installations of retail urea dispensing stations are still few and far between.

The industry's North American SCR Stakeholder Group has done a commendable job in developing and communicating a rollout plan for the new urea infrastructure including an online locator app that will enable truckers to find the nearest pump. Access to urea filling is crucial as the EPA requires strict controls on 'empty tank' diagnostics: If an SCR equipped truck runs low on urea a warning message is sent to the driver followed by successive electronically controlled penalties on maximum engine speed and load. Ultimately a driver may have to park and decouple his trailer so he can 'limp home' to refill the urea tank before continuing his loaded cargo route. Such concessions were necessary to win EPA's support for 2010 SCR certification without fears of empty urea tanks and ineffective emissions catalysts.

With a critical mass of OEM SCR adoption and infrastructure construction now in hand the Catch-22 issue appears adequately resolved for urea availability by 2010.