



20% of haulage firms use 'washed' diesel

**By Nicola Cooke
Industry Correspondent**

Up to one-in-five haulage companies in Ireland are using illegal "washed" green diesel, and the exchequer is losing €150 million annually as a result, according to the Irish Road Haulage Association (IRHA).

The association will hold nine regional meetings of more than 1,000 members over the next few weeks to discuss what action they will take over the issue, which is enabling some businesses to win contracts by undercutting those who pay for legitimate fuel.

It wants an end to the colouring of diesel, and is lobby-

ing finance minister Michael Noonan to introduce a 10 cent rebate per litre scheme for hauliers, farmers and agricultural contractors, which they claim would cost €100 million but would bring in tax revenue of €300 million.

Owen Cooke, chairman of The Pallet Network, the country's largest distributed freight network, said members of the network had been approached by illegal operators on many occasions.

"Members have come to us and said 'We're being offered this cheap diesel. Everyone in our area is using it. Can we not buy some of it to get our costs down?'"

"It is costing 30 to 50 cent a

litre less than regular diesel, so filling a 1,500 litre tank results in a saving that some hauliers and motorists - just can't resist," he said.

"It is not good enough that the government and authorities are not doing more to clamp down on this."

IRHA president Eoin Gavin, who also owns a haulage company based in Co Clare, said diesel "washers" were pulling up at haulage businesses and offering to wash [change the colour from 'off road' green to 'commercial' white] diesel in back yards.

He said that while Revenue was losing fuel tax and Vat, and legitimate haulage companies were losing contracts, there was also a significant

cost to the environment.

"Since low-sulphur diesel was introduced at petrol filling pumps 18 months ago, customs officers are finding it impossible to detect, as the dye trace element is not there any more," Gavin said.

"Ibec and others have estimated that over 15 per cent of fuel in fuel forecourts is laundered. We would agree, but in the haulage industry, it could be as high as 20 per cent. This is the raw material for our business so we will not stand by and see criminals hijack the industry. If we have to protest in blockades to get results from the state, we will."