

Cold Weather Diesel Truck Care

In cold weather a diesel truck requires special attention because petroleum wax will form in the diesel tank when the temperature of the diesel falls below the cloud point of the fuel, causing the fuel to gel up. When this happens, the truck is undrivable until the fuel warms back up above the cloud point. The Colonial Pipeline which transports refined products from the Gulf Coast to the Northeast sets a maximum cloud point at 15.8° F for diesel shipped between August 1st and March 14th (winter blend) and 19.4° F (summer blend) for the rest of the year. When temperatures are expected to fall below the cloud point, you need to put an additive in the fuel tank that drops the temperature that the fuel gels up. Proper additives can drop the gel point to below -10° F and can be bought at most auto parts stores and many gas stations.

Many diesel trucks have a block heater that is used to warm up the engine block to allow the engine to run better when it is initially started. The block heater requires an external electric supply. Your owner's manual will tell you the temperature that you must use it. In the Ford manual it suggests using the block heater when temperatures fall below 10° F. Ford also suggest running the heater for 3 hours at a time, which is the time it takes to fully heat up the engine block. You can use the block heater at higher temperatures with the primary benefit being the cab heater will kick in much sooner. Always remember to unplug the heater before you start the truck. For those of us who live in South, a sticky note on the steering wheel as a reminder may be a good idea.

The last issue is DEF because it freezes at 12° F; however, there is nothing that you need to do as the DEF systems have heaters installed in the DEF tank. Ford uses an electric heating element in the DEF tank. Do not add any antifreeze to the DEF tanks as that will harm the DEF system