

Spartanburg County Retrofitting Trucks to Reduce Diesel Emissions



Source: Spartanburg Heald-Journal
Date: July 28, 2010
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Spartanburg County took its first step Tuesday in improving the air quality of its diesel truck fleet.

When the work is complete, nine on-road diesel trucks will be retrofitted with a filter and electric heater system that reduces particulate emissions by trapping and cooking the captured diesel particulate — much like a self-cleaning oven — while the vehicle is parked overnight. The nitrogen dioxide emissions are reduced by about half, and no black smoke will come from the vehicles.

When the trucks are parked, the driver will plug the system into a 208-volt outlet, and heaters will burn off the matter, converting it to harmless gases. The heating and regeneration process takes about four hours and consumes about \$1.50 in electricity.

“We’re very aware of the need for us to do our part and be good stewards,” said County Councilwoman Jane Hall. “We want to make sure health standards stay high, and it’s great to have the first process starting today.”

The nine vehicles that are being retrofitted represent about 13 percent of the county’s on-road diesel fleet.

The upgrades were financed through a \$148,000 state Department of Health and Environmental Control grant. Upstate Forever partnered with the county on the project, and Cummins Atlantic of Spartanburg is retrofitting the vehicles.

Johnnie Lewis, the county’s manager of fleet services, said Upstate Forever approached him about applying for the grant. Lewis said since the county was successful this time, it will look for other ways to retrofit vehicles to improve air quality.

Lewis said the county is researching a program that uses propane gas to power vehicles, and the county has implemented a “no idle” policy for all vehicles to help reduce emissions.

Brian Barnes, with the state Bureau of Air Quality, said the project is part of a larger effort to put more focus on air quality and its impact on economic development. Diesel emissions can make worse such health conditions as asthma, allergies and heart and lung disease, he said.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, about 56 percent of particulate matter emissions are from diesel engines.

Every dollar spent on clean diesel products produces up to \$13 in health benefits, according to the EPA.

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Spartanburg County is in attainment with ozone standards, but new levels will be released in about six weeks and are expected to be more stringent.

If the county isn't in attainment, Barnes said the federal government will look at programs — such as the new “clean” diesel program — to see what public-private partnerships have been formed to improve air quality. Counties in non-attainment could lose federal highway funds and have restrictions placed on new industry.

Angela Viney, of Upstate Forever, said the nonprofit agency will continue to look for other ways to partner with government agencies to improve air quality and reduce harmful emissions.

For more on local clean air initiatives and the county's attainment status, visit www.cleanairspartanburg.com.

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