

Regions Buses Get New Filters



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A diesel-powered Vacaville City Coach bus that has been retrofitted with new exhaust filters . . .

Vacaville City Coach riders can breath easier - as can the rest of the community - thanks to a new program aimed at reducing air pollution generated by buses across the Bay Area.

At a San Francisco press conference Tuesday, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and representatives from regional transit systems touted the near completion of a diesel cleanup program for city buses, including seven in Vacaville.

Through the Clean Diesel Bus Program, more than 1,700 diesel buses from 13 Bay Area transit districts are being retrofitted with diesel exhaust filters. Combined, these high-tech emission control filters annually capture more than 50 tons of particulate matter and 436 tons of oxides of nitrogen that otherwise would have been emitted into the air, officials said.

So far, Vacaville City Coach has installed three diesel exhaust purifiers with four more pending. That will comprise the transit system's entire diesel fleet. When complete, Vacaville City Coach will emit 413 pounds less particulate matter and 3,605 pounds less oxides of nitrogen as well as 735 pounds less of hydrocarbons each year, MTC officials said.

Diesel particulate matter is a toxic air contaminant that can cause lung disease and cancer. Oxides of nitrogen, another component of diesel exhaust, is a precursor to ozone, which can cause respiratory disease, according to the California Air Resources Board.

Funding for the retrofitting is being provided by the air district, MTC and the region's transit districts.

Vice Mayor Pauline Clancy, who has sat on the Yolo-Solano Air Quality Management Board for about three years, said Vacaville has cleaner air than a lot of other communities. However, Vacaville does have the highest asthma rate among children of the entire county, she said, so air quality is an important issue for the city.

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“We really do try to keep the air as clean as possible,” Clancy said. Installation of the filtering devices, which are manufactured by San Leandro-based Cleaire Advanced Emission Controls, began in 2003. Nearly 1,400 exhaust filters for Bay Area buses already have been delivered. Most of the remaining filters are scheduled for installation by the end of 2006.

“The Air District is committed to achieving clean air to protect the public’s health and the environment,” said Jack Broadbent, executive officer of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. “Technology can play an important role in reducing emissions from mobile sources and help the Bay Area to attain and maintain air quality standards. This project represents a step toward reducing emissions from buses in our region.”

While the 13 Bay Area transit districts participating in the bus retrofit have purchased some clean new buses - Vacaville has eight compressed natural gas powered buses, for example - most of the exhaust reduction is coming from the installation of diesel exhaust filters on existing buses that have years of life remaining. The devices capture 85 percent of the particulate matter and reduce 25 percent of the oxides of nitrogen created by the buses’ engines. Each installation costs about \$18,000, compared to \$140,000 or more for a new bus.

“The installation of the exhaust filters goes a long way to improving air quality,” said Steve Heminger, executive director of MTC. “Retrofitting buses is a cost-effective way to clean our air.”

San Francisco Muni is leading the way for the Bay Area by retrofitting 424 of its diesel buses. AC Transit will have 416 diesel exhaust filters when its retrofit program is complete in December.

And Vacaville City Coach isn’t the only Solano County bus service that is participating in the retrofits. Vallejo Transit will retrofit 32 buses and Fairfield-Suisun Transit will retrofit 25.

As a result, Vallejo Transit will emit 1,888 pounds less particulate matter, 16,480 pounds less oxides of nitrogen, and 3,360 pounds less of hydrocarbons each year. In Fairfield, the changes mean Fairfield-Suisun Transit will emit 1,475 pounds less particulate matter, 12,875 pounds less oxides of nitrogen, and 2,625 pounds less of hydrocarbons each year. #

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