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BioFuels Moving Long Island



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In 2007, Smithtown became the first East Coast town to shift its refuse trucks (22) off diesel fuel made from petroleum, most of it imported, and into domestically produced natural gas. Over the 7-year period of its contracts with four private carters, the Town's estimated fuel savings per home per year exceed the incremental cost of the new natural gas trucks. In addition, Smithtown forecasts that residents will avoid exposure over the term of the contracts to 265 tons of nitrogen oxides and 15 tons of soot.

Smithtown's success has influenced other towns on Long Island including Brookhaven, Oyster Bay, and Huntington, to invest in natural gas vehicles. Most recently, an award of \$15 million to the Greater Long Island Clean Cities Coalition, will assist towns to purchase refuse 43 natural gas refuse trucks and 44 other natural gas trucks. In addition, natural gas powers all 330 of Long Island's municipal transit buses and a school bus fleet in Long Beach.

The spread of natural gas as the fuel of choice for municipal fleets may, however, be only the first stage of a transition to a truly sustainable fuel, according to Energy Vision, a national nonprofit organization head-quartered in New York City. Any vehicle that uses natural gas can go all the way

to sustainability by shifting to biomethane, once these supplies are available. Biomethane is exactly the same thing as natural gas, except that you make it by processing organic wastes.

Russell K. Barnett, Smithtown's director of environment and waterways, and others on Long Island are now exploring what it would take to develop biomethane from household, yard, and commercial wastes that are presently hauled hundreds of miles at great expense across New York and Pennsylvania to be buried in Ohio. They are beginning to look into the possibility that locally-sited anaerobic digestion of Long Island's most plentiful "biomass" resource could yield at least five economic and environmental benefits for Long Island communities: reduced waste disposal costs; "green" jobs; sustainable fuel supplies; heating for local facilities; and fertilizer for parks, golf courses, and vineyards.

Sweden, France, Austria, Norway, Spain, and other European nations are ahead of the US in developing biomethane fuel for urban fleets of trucks and buses. However, biomethane production is in early stages in the US, boosted by research and practice demonstrating this fuel's commercial and environmental merits, and facilitated by the

widespread distribution of wastes from which biomethane can be produced.

Strategies used by Long Island communities to move toward sustainable vehicle fuel is the subject of a new study by Energy Vision. "We believe that Long Island towns are showing how to pick up the pace of progress in breaking this country's dangerous addiction to petroleum, protecting public health, and stimulating "green" business," says Joanna D. Underwood, EV president. "Energy Vision seeks to encourage other communities in the NYC area to adapt the Long Island model. We also hope to educate policy makers to see the urgency of developing stronger long-term incentives to support these initiatives."

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