

Push for greener refuse trucks

Environment

By C. Gottlieb

Lower overall costs. Cleaner air. Complete dependance on domestic North American sources. Does this sound too good to be true? Well, in the waste hauling business, the partial push to natural gas is underway.

Notable early adopters include the City of Smithtown on Long Island and the Department of Sanitation here in New York and several other cities around the United States.

Several independent haulers are also using cleaner, natural gas vehicles and several were on display at a conference held at Brooklyn College.

Youngsters are particularly sensitive to vehicle pollution. As of 2000, 10 percent of New York City youth suffer from asthma compared to about 6 percent in the U.S. Asthma rates are highest in congested areas. Diesel emissions are known as contributing to asthma. Clean Natural Gas is considered up to 20

percent cleaner by many standards and the potential exists for even cleaner hybrid refuse trucks in the not too distant future.

One adopter of clean natural gas vehicles is Smithtown on Long Island. After a long review of options the town of Smith became convinced that natural gas, rather than diesel would be cleaner (by up to 20 percent) and less costly. Along with lower maintenance, Clean Natural Gas or (CNG) costs about \$1 per gallon equivalent versus \$3-4 for diesel as of October.

Smithtown doesn't actually buy the vehicles but contracts for all associated costs with a private company.

Although the CNG trucks cost \$50,000 to \$70,000 more than current edition diesel models, the lower fuel cost of natural gas along with various tax credits taken by the providing private companies make the time to cover the additional costs short-perhaps as quick as five



Showing how relatively clean, natural gas vehicles can be, Jim Rennick shows a mostly clean hankerchief after being held near the exhaust of the large vehicle that Metropolitan Paper Recycling uses.

to seven years. These savings have been passed on to Smithtown residents.

The higher initial costs are relatively lower still, when in 2010 new tougher standards for diesel trucks

go into effect. It will cost thousands for existing diesel trucks to be upgraded, whereas CNG vehicles will not need the upgrade.

Smithtown's experience with CNG refuse trucks has been positive enough that they have a new town policy that all their township vehicles be natural gas!

In addition to the potential for lower fuel cost and cleaner air there are other potential benefits. These include lower maintenance costs, and some say excellent cold weather performance. Lower noise is also a feature of CNG vehicles, but whether this is a benefit is up for interpretation; after all, a certain amount of noise lets you know a truck is coming down, or is on the block.

The Department of Sanitation is another early adopter, convinced of their benefits, the DSNY bought 10 for use late this year. They will evaluate them as they would do with any new technology. They have purchased earlier technology CNG vehicles earlier in the decade and expect these newer models to perform better, as they would expect with any progress-

ing technology. All DSNY trucks must also be strong enough to push snow, so the DSNY expects the new CNG trucks to work hard if they will indeed pass muster.

Clean natural gas is one component of a cleaner, less costly energy policy. If hybrid technology is combined with upcoming generations of CNG trucks, the cost advantages and environmental advantages can be even more significant.



Luis Torres, associate director, Center for Sustainable Energy, Bronx Community College discusses some of the latest clean fuel technologies with Sheree Jeanes of Clean Energy Fuels.

Photos by C. Gottlieb