

FINANCE AND COMMERCE

Construction

August 5, 2009

EPA helping construction firms make diesel equipment cleaner

by [Brian Johnson](#) Staff Writer

A \$3 million federal stimulus grant is coming to Minnesota as part of an effort to reduce pollution from diesel-powered equipment.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently awarded the grant to the Minnesota Environmental Initiative. MEI officials describe the award as “one of the largest nonprofit EPA grants in the country.”

MEI will use the money to expand its 4-year-old Project Green Fleet program. Through the program, MEI works with manufacturers and installers to equip diesel vehicles with “filters, catalyst mufflers and other technologies that can reduce engine emissions by up to 50 percent.”

Until now, the program has largely focused on retrofits to school buses. With the grant, MEI will be able to broaden its focus to other industries that use diesel fleets and equipment, according to Bill Droessler, MEI’s director of environmental projects.

“With this funding, we will be much more into construction equipment,” Droessler said, adding that the MEI is working with the Associated General Contractors of Minnesota, the Aggregate and Ready Mix Association and other industry groups to spread word about the program.

Besides reducing pollution, participating companies get cleaner, more efficient vehicles that last longer than non-retrofitted machines, he said.

Some of the upgrades require a 25 percent match from the owner. Cost of the retrofits varies from about \$25,000 to \$60,000, depending on the vehicle, Droessler said.

Green Fleet focuses on diesel engines for a reason: diesel vehicles account for 50 percent of the traffic-generated air pollution in Minnesota, even though such vehicles represent only 10 percent of all vehicle traffic in the state, according to MEI.

In Minnesota, more than 1,200 school buses – as well as a growing number of commercial vehicles – have been retrofitted through the program.

Inspired in part by Project Green Fleet, Hennepin County and Ames Construction outfitted a used, 50-ton crawler crane last year with a diesel oxidation catalyst (DOC) muffler. The crane was used on the Crosstown reconstruction project in Minneapolis.

DOC installations can reduce particulate matter emissions by as much as 20 percent, according to EPA estimates. Particulate matter emissions can contribute to lung and heart disease and other serious health problems.

Cemstone and Braun Intertec are among the local companies that have worked with Project Green Fleet.

Tim Becken, senior vice president of operations for Cemstone, a Mendota Heights-based concrete and aggregate supplier, said his company had special emissions-reducing filters installed on five trucks.

So far, it has worked out well, he said. The only investment from the company’s side was some in-house labor to install the equipment.

“It took several hours per truck with our mechanics. It was not a significant capital outlay for us,” Becken said.

One concern going in was that the new equipment might hurt the trucks’ performance, but that has not been the case, he said.

“We didn’t see any negatives at all,” he said. “Frankly, that is pretty nice when you can get improved environmental performance and no other performance cost or problems. ... We would put 100 on if we could. I think it is a good program.”

In partnership with MEI, Braun Intertec, a Minneapolis-based provider of engineering, environmental consulting and other services, has installed special emissions-control devices on a handful of its drill rigs and carriers.

“Now that this EPA grant has come through, they have more resources to work with us to retrofit more of our equipment,” Carlson said. “We are quite excited about it.”

Braun Intertec has had a relationship with MEI for “probably pushing 20 years,” Carlson added.

“When Project Green Fleet came out, they were focusing on school buses. I told them if they got into being able to help out with the commercial sector, we were very interested and would like to participate. They kept us in the loop.”

So far, company officials have noticed that its equipped rigs are running quieter, with no negative impact on performance.

“We keep our equipment in pretty good shape,” Carlson said. “I don’t think it was a situation [before the retrofits] where it was puking out big black clouds of smoke. But that doesn’t mean that there is not a real good benefit to having the equipment on there.

“A lot of times it is what you can’t see that is just as bad as what you can.”

Copyright 2009 Finance and Commerce All Rights Reserved
U.S. Trust Building Suite 100, Minneapolis, MN 55402 (612) 333-4244