

Cleaner machines

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Oregon schools and hospital systems work to reduce diesel emissions by heavy-duty vehicles and equipment and hope their projects fuel more widespread efforts



Dan Carter/DJC

Contractors working on projects for Oregon Health & Science University, Legacy Health System and Kaiser Permanente will be directed to reduce their diesel equipment's emissions as part of a commitment signed Monday by the hospitals.

BY ALISON RYAN
alison.ryan@djcOregon.com

They may not be as sleek as hybrids, nor find as innovative a use for french fry grease as biodiesels do. But big yellow school buses, tractors and delivery trucks have started to make less of an impact on Oregon's environment, too.

Breathing easier

On Monday, Oregon Health & Science University, Legacy Health System, Providence Health System and Kaiser Permanente announced a joint clean diesel project. The "Clean Diesel Hospital Zones" effort, funded by a \$250,000 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency grant, aims to reduce emissions by hospital trucks and other operations as well as emissions by hospital vendors and from construction projects.

Focus on diesel air pollution in the state has been tightening. The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality - along with partner organizations - has secured \$3 million in federal grants over the past three years for clean diesel projects. The recent grant awards are expected to serve a dual purpose - they'll facilitate specific projects, said Kevin Downing, DEQ clean diesel program coordinator, and also show diesel owners that the retrofits are effective.

"Right now," he said, "we're working on demonstrating to people that these types of technology really work on their equipment."

Retrofit technology will be put into practice in the hospital project. Each system will use its yet-to-be divvied piece of the \$250,000 grant to focus on specific emissions needs. At Providence Health System, said Michael Geller, recycling and waste management supervisor, catalytic screen filter retrofits are planned for more than 20 hospital trucks with additional money going toward cleaner fuel and equipment.

"The trucks are the biggest ones," he said. "They go out into the community every day."

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Exhaust-reducing retrofits, ultra-low-sulfur diesel in both vehicles and power generation systems are also among steps planned by the other hospital systems.

Even wider community impact is expected from the next steps of the project, which call for reduction of diesel emissions by vendors, service providers and contractors working on new construction projects. Some – such as Coastwide Laboratories – already use cleaner fuel, and steps such as environmentally preferred purchasing policies and contract specifications for cleaner fuel and equipment are expected to nudge others toward environmental friendliness.

Challenges are expected during implementation, said Skai Dancey, director of facility operations at OHSU.

"It's a change. It's a change that is really good, but it is a change," Dancey said. "I think we'll just have to exercise our partnerships with our contractors and suppliers."

But still, said Tom Badrick, sustainability coordinator at Legacy Health System, the changes are not ones the hospital systems anticipate having to force.

"We're all trying to do a better

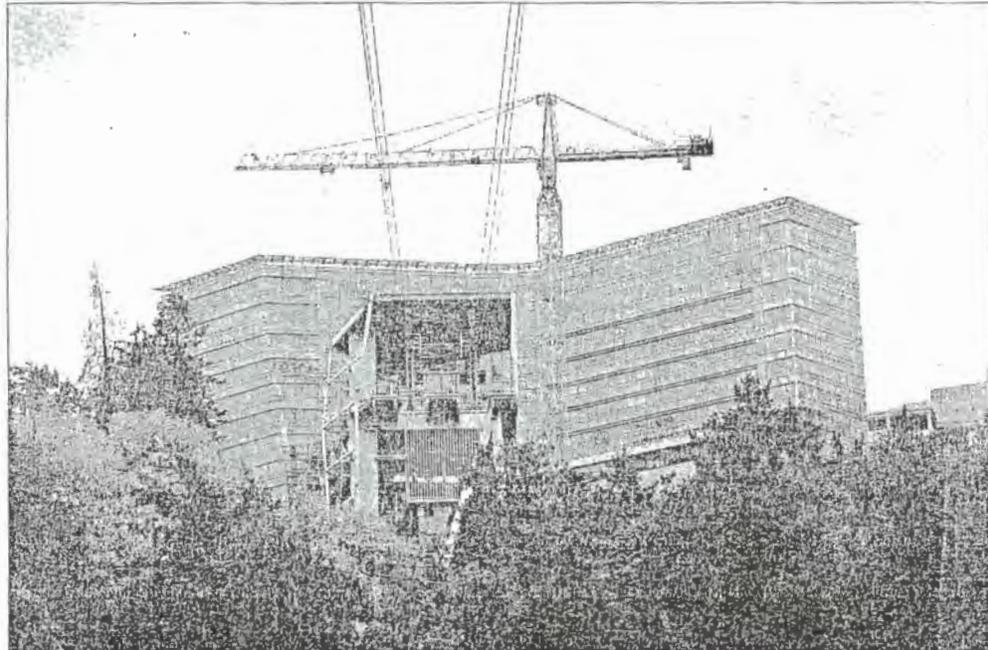
job with the environment. ... Our goal is to make a better, healthier environment," he said. "And down the road, they're going to have to do this anyway."

Learning curve

Other heavy-duty diesel vehicles have already started reducing emissions. During the summer, Central School District 131 – which covers Independence and Monmouth – installed emission-reducing technology within the engine and exhaust systems of 21 school buses, becoming one of an increasing number of Oregon districts to do so.

Transportation departments – and school districts in particular – are becoming more aware of the emission effects, said Gary Parsons, fleet business unit manager at Instrument Sales & Service Inc., which oversaw the district project as well as other retrofits in Oregon and throughout the country.

"And I think they're attempting to provide a better environment from the population that they serve," he said. "Additionally, there's been lot of attention to global warming, and the additional area of dependence on foreign oil. And one of the issues that is always on the table is cleaning up the air."



Dan Carter/DJC

Oregon Health & Science University plans to cut construction-related diesel emissions by adding language to specifications for contractors. "We'll definitely give preferential treatment to companies that do control their exhaust," said Skai Dancey, director of facility operations at OHSU.

While there has been interest in equipment retrofits, Downing said, cost remains a barrier. A state of Oregon tax credit will pay for up to 35 percent of the retrofit cost, but no other financial incentives exist.

"The need is so great," Downing said. "It's frustrating not to be able to get at that in a larger-scale way."

Funding is always an issue, Parsons said. And while other states have retrofit mandates in place, Oregon does not. But,

Parsons said, he expects attention to diesel emission controls to keep growing.

"I suspect as time goes on," he said, "Oregon will become more aware of the need to do these types of initiatives."