Lake County School District No. 7

Sean Gallagher Superintendent
Janet Melsness Business Manager
Rebecca Hargis Executive Secretary

"Everything we do, we do in the best interest of students"

4/16/2015

Dear Honorable Senator Dembrow, Senator Edwards, and Senator Prozanski:

Our office has been requested to provide comment on the topic of the use of biodiesel fuel with our school district transportation system. The district currently maintains a fleet of 11 diesel powered buses. The Lakeview community is remote and isolated, residing at an altitude of 4800 feet in elevation. Student safety in regards to our transportation system is of the highest priority. If a bus breaks down transporting students, it could easily occur in a remote region during inclement weather conditions that prevent immediate assistance.

Living in a remote location presents a number of challenges for our transportation fleet. Drivers must have excellent inclement weather driving skills, especially since our regular bus routes and trips are very lengthy. The average route time for our students before and after school is between 60-65 minutes one way. Trips usually vary between 1.5 hours to 7+ hours one way. The miles driven are very isolated and when snow is mixed with wind, blizzard conditions are quite common.

To maintain the reliability of our transportation services, the district takes a number of extra steps. The district employs an Oregon Certified Bus Driver Trainer that regularly trains bus drivers for inclement weather conditions and safety scenarios. The district also employs an ASE (Automotive Service Excellence) Certified Master Mechanic with Ford Senior Master Technician credentials including Oregon Bus Inspector Certification. The level and types of certifications held by the district bus mechanic is of the highest attainable where less than 1% of ASE Certified Mechanics nationwide hold the same level of certifications. Many of the comments below in regards to the use of biodiesel in our bus fleet have been formulated with our mechanics direct consultation.

The district has experienced multiple scenarios where the biodiesel gels around +10 degrees Fahrenheit unless properly treated. The local fuel distributor does treat the biodiesel during the colder months of the year, but at this elevation, cold temperatures and inclement conditions such as snow storms can even occur during the summer months. When biodiesel gels, the fuel lines including the fuel filter become plugged, preventing proper fuel from flowing to the engine. If the engine is not running, heat is not being produced to heat the passenger area of the bus. The likelihood of this occurring with biodiesel that is not properly treated is very high. An unheated passenger area with delayed assistance due to our remote location during inclement weather

conditions can create an unsafe environment for our students. As we all know, sometimes students do not dress appropriately for the current weather conditions.

Mechanically, once a bus is no longer operating due to biodiesel gelling, the bus must be towed and heated to a higher temperature to allow the biodiesel to flow again. The nearest tow truck that is capable of towing a full sized bus is located in Klamath Falls, 90 miles to the west. Once the biodiesel is flowing, the mechanic then evaluates whether any additional damage has occurred to the engine. Damage will most likely extend to replacement of the fuel filter, injection ports, and injector pump. Those approximate costs are itemized below:

Tow = $1,000+

Fuel Filter = $50

Injector Ports = $3000+

Injector Pump = $2500

Total = $6550

Summary: One size fits all legislation does not work very well for our school district. Flexibility is always welcome with proper accountabilities built in. A great example of this is the legislation that allows our buses to run studded snow tires year round. At our elevation, snow can fall at any time of the year. Without the flexibility to run studded snow tires year round, we would be encountering a much higher potential for bus accidents. We would certainly request similar flexibility in legislation regarding the required use of biodiesel. If we had access to Diesel#1 throughout the year that was void of the corn oil additive, it would allow us to operate our buses much more reliably in cold weather conditions since the gel point doesn't start until the ambient temperature hits -30 degrees Fahrenheit. We appreciate your considerations and time. Feel free to contact me if I can be of any further service.

Sincerely,

Sean Gallagher

Superintendent