

“GREEN” BUSES DELIVER STUDENTS AND SAVINGS

Innovative St. Louis area school district saves taxpayers money, promotes cleaner air for students.

AT A GLANCE

INDUSTRY
School District

COMPANY



O'Fallon, Missouri

BENEFITS OF PROPANE

- Lower fuel costs
- Less taxpayer money spent towards fuel

Jeff Schwepker, the Director of Transportation for the Ft. Zumwalt R-II School District in the St. Louis Metro area, knows something about efficiently moving students. He also understands how to maximize the transportation budget of a school district with a fleet of 168 vehicles. He smiles when he talks about the eight propane powered buses that were introduced into the district's fleet in the fall of 2012. Schwepker explains that adding propane buses was the brainchild of his predecessor, Tom Berry. "Tom got this ball rolling because diesel fuel prices were high, and he was looking for ways to save money."

Since the buses came from the factory ready to run propane, no conversion was necessary. The district only needed to install a pumping station – a small cost in comparison with the anticipated savings. For their propane requirements, Schwepker said the district has worked closely with Paul Schmidt and his team at Ferrellgas in St. Peters. "We worked with them on the pumping station, and they've been a really good partner."

The transportation department treated the new propane buses no differently than any other new bus the district would bring into the fleet. Schwepker remarked that it's no longer a surprise that they perform at least as well as the diesels.

Reaping the Benefits

According to Schwepker, Ft. Zumwalt saw immediate cost savings from the use of propane. Though the propane buses deliver fewer miles per gallon (about 4.0 mpg vs 6.5 for diesel-powered buses), the much lower fuel price for propane more than makes up for that. "Right now, a gallon of propane runs about \$1.35, where we'd pay \$3.40 to \$3.60 per gallon for diesel. But we also receive a federal government rebate of \$0.50 per gallon for the propane. So to go 6.5 miles, we're at about \$3.50 for diesel, or \$1.38 for propane." That's a 60% reduction in fuel costs.

Yet fuel efficiency isn't the only benefit the school district sees from propane. "Even though today's diesel engines run much cleaner than they did in the past, propane is an even cleaner fuel, and that environmental aspect was also important to us."

The bus engines – and drivers – also seem to prefer propane. "The engines run much cooler with propane. That's really good, because where there is less heat, there's less friction," which should reduce maintenance requirements. "And because propane engines have no trouble starting in cold weather, the drivers don't have to arrive at 3am on cold winter mornings to get the buses warmed up so they can be started. Instead, they can just come in and start them at the same time as any other time of the year."

Despite the many savings and benefits of the district's propane program, Schwepker quipped that the reduced engine noise in propane buses came with an unexpected downside. He's heard some tongue-in-cheek complaints from district parents who say they used to be able to hear the bus before it came over the hill, and send their kids out then. Now, those parents can't hear the (much quieter) propane bus until it's "right there"!



Jeff Schwepker with one of the school district's propane-powered school buses.

Jeff Schwepker with one of the school district's propane-powered school buses.

Expanding the Fleet

The success of the fleet's first eight propane buses led to another order for the coming school year. Near the end of June, the district will take delivery on 22 more propane-powered buses, ordered to replace older diesel buses that are being rotated out of its fleet.

Positive Attention for the District

The addition of propane buses to the Ft. Zumwalt School District fleet has drawn local and national media attention. St. Louis' NBC affiliate KSDK Channel 5 recently ran a story on the fleet, and national publication School Transportation News is scheduled to do a cover story on the district's use of propane vehicles in an upcoming issue.



The use of propane is proudly displayed.

CLEAN AWARD WINNER – For their use of propane-powered equipment to replace gasoline or diesel fuel consumption, the Fort Zumwalt School District received one of the five statewide Missouri Propane Education and Research Council (MO-PERC) 2013 CLEAN Awards – **Community Leadership in Environmental Awareness Now.**

About MO-PERC

The Missouri Propane Education and Research Council (MO-PERC) is a not-for-profit organization authorized by the Missouri legislature to promote industry education, public safety and consumer awareness of propane.