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MEDIA CONTACT

Brian Atkinson
(205) 532-0079
briandatkinson@earthlink.net

Clean Energy for Transportation Focus of Workshop

The Deepwater Horizon oil spill has ignited a serious discussion of the future course of energy policy in the United States. In his address from the Oval Office last week, President Barack Obama made a call for our nation to move from our addiction to fossil fuels to a future fueled by clean, renewable American energy. In the wake of this public call, over a hundred individuals representing businesses, fleets, and governmental entities gathered in Hoover, Alabama to discuss the currently available transportation fuel alternatives and technologies that will be a part of this sea-change shift in energy policy focus.

"The rapid adoption of alternative fuels across the country is more important than ever and it needs to start today," stated Robert White, Director of Market Development for the Renewable Fuels Association (RFA). "We have the technology, we have the fuels, and we have the expertise, let's answer President Obama's call and reduce our reliance on fossil fuels today."

Workshop topics covered such alternative fuels as ethanol, compressed natural gas (NCG), propane, and biodiesel. These alternative fuels are currently available to help reduce the nation's fossil fuel addiction. Specific areas of information on these fuels ranging from fuel quality to infrastructure, vehicle availability, safety, and current incentives were presented and discussed by nationally and statewide recognized speakers and government officials. The workshop also provided information on advanced technologies that will likely be part of the future movement towards clean energy, provided insight into choosing the right fuel to meet fueling needs; and highlighted funding opportunities to implement alternative motor fuels into personal and public energy consumption.

"Four dollar gasoline had shown us that it was time to diversify our transportation fuel consumption and the oil spill is a very unfortunate reminder," Mark Bentley, Executive Director of the Alabama Clean Fuels Coalition said. "The workshop was designed to help governmental entities, businesses, fleet operators, and individuals gain knowledge and background on what small steps we can take now to make the transition from oil to a cleaner, less dependent energy future."

Events such as today's Alternative Fuels Educational Workshop have helped spur increased movement towards alternative fuels in Alabama. Programs in place throughout the state displaced over 1.5 million gallons of foreign oil consumption in 2009 alone.

Hoover Mayor Tony Petelos and the Alabama Clean Fuels Coalition welcomed the speakers and attendees before the program began delving into specific topics.

The advantages of natural gas were presented by nationally recognized expert, Stephe Yborra, of the Clean Vehicle Education Foundation (CVEF). Natural gas is domestically produced and infrastructure already exists to distribute the fuel to end-users. Thus, natural gas has become popular as an alternative transportation fuel. Locally, Birmingham has one public compressed natural gas fueling station at the Birmingham Jefferson County Transit Authority (BJCTA) site on 8th Avenue North. The BJCTA also recently announced that two new natural gas-powered buses would be added to their already substantial fleet.

Kristy Moore of the Renewable Fuels Association (RFA) discussed the current and future availability and advantages of ethanol followed by a presentation on biodiesel by Richard Nelson of the National Biodiesel Board. Technology continues to improve the multiple feed stock sources available to produce both ethanol and biodiesel. Private businesses, often through partnerships with the Alabama Clean Fuels Coalition and public entities, have already made thirty-nine E85 ethanol and biodiesel pumps available to consumers. Governmental entities in Alabama have implemented many renewable fuel powered vehicles and programs into their fleets. Specifically, the City of Birmingham has six hundred fleet vehicles fueled with biodiesel and ALDOT, the State Motor Pool, and City of Hoover use E85 ethanol in the many flex-fuel vehicles within their fleets.

News about electric-powered vehicles will begin to spread as new models continue hitting showrooms across the U.S. On hand to discuss these and other advanced technologies was Brendan Prebo of ASG Renaissance.

Greg Zilberfab of the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) reminded many in attendance about propane. Like natural gas, propane enjoys a strong distribution network and has many appropriate applications.

The workshop rounded out with a panel discussion that included representatives of many of the above mentioned state and local entities that have increased their utilization of alternative fuels. The panel experts provided first hand accounts of their experiences with all aspects of implementing an alternative fuel program.

Many governmental, business, and fleet operators were highly attuned to the final presentations of the day by Stephe Yborra and Kristy Moore. The Clean Vehicle Education Foundation and Renewable Fuels Association representatives joined together

to discuss currently available incentives for developing alternative fuels programs and the steps needed to implement their move to cleaner, domestically produced fuels.

The Alternative Fuels Educational Workshop was developed and coordinated by the Renewable Fuels Association, Clean Vehicle Education Foundation, Propane Association, The National Biodiesel Foundation, and the Alabama Clean Fuels Coalition, a member of the U.S. Department of Energy's Clean Cities program.

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