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EPA grant cleans up bus emissions

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Forty-eight school buses in Lake County, including some that service Grayslake, will soon release less in-cabin and tailpipe emissions, thanks to an Environmental Protection Agency grant.

Jones School Bus Service, Inc., a wholly-owned subsidiary of Durham School Services, received the grant from a partnership between the EPA and the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago. The grant covers the cost of retrofitting the buses with parts that will reduce emissions.

The 48 buses will serve four school districts, including Grayslake Community High School District 127, Oak Grove District 68, Mundelein Elementary District 75 and Big Hollow District 38.

"We need to do what we can, not only for the kids but also for the environment," said Mike Zelek, assistant superintendent for business services in District 127.

Kevin Tynan, deputy executive director of marketing for the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago, said the Association received an EPA grant a year ago specifically to clean up buses.

Ron Brandt, general manager at Durham's Grayslake customer service center, said the company applied for the grant in 2006-07 and received \$96,000 in funds for the parts to retrofit 43 buses. Three weeks ago, the company learned that there was enough money leftover to retrofit five more buses.

"To me, it's a win-win. All it's going to cost me is some mechanic labor," said Brandt. "We're going to have 48 buses that won't be polluting the atmosphere, at least not as much as they used to."

According to the Respiratory Health Association, diesel exhaust contains more than 40 toxic air contaminants.

Additionally, the Association said such emissions "trigger an estimated 900 asthma attacks in Lake County annually and more than 875 deaths and 19,000 asthma attacks in Illinois."

The emissions-reducing retrofitting will be two-fold. The first part of the process will be the installation of closed crankcase filtration systems that will reduce the in-cabin diesel emissions.

Tynan said research showed that diesel emissions inside the bus typically come from the crankcase at the front of the bus.

"Certainly so many kids have asthma these days, so we need to reduce the emissions in bus cabins," said Tynan.

The closed crankcase filtration system "can nearly eliminate the in-cabin emissions," said Anna Frostic, an environmental health advocate for the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago.

The second part of the retrofitting process, which includes installing diesel oxidation catalysts, will reduce tailpipe emissions by 30 to 50 percent, Frostic said.

Brandt said the diesel oxidation catalyst will replace the existing mufflers on the buses.

"Obviously, that's where a lot of the pollution goes," said Tynan.

Brandt said the parts to retrofit the buses came in three to four weeks ago..

"We are just in the beginning stages of getting the buses retrofitted," he said.

He hopes to have all 48 buses retrofitted by the end of December.



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