

Bold Policies Make Washington, D.C., an Alternative Fuel Leader

Faced with serious air quality problems, Washington, D.C., has established an aggressive alternative fuel vehicle (AFV) acquisition policy that surpasses Energy Policy Act (EPA Act) requirements. Innovative fueling system technology enables an even more impressive feat—100% alternative fuel use in the city's AFVs. Keenly aware of its unique leadership role, Washington is spreading AFV use throughout its metropolitan area and setting an example of alternative fuel success for the nation.

Beyond EPA Act

EPA Act requires certain state government and alternative fuel provider fleets to acquire light-duty AFVs as a percentage of their yearly vehicle acquisitions. As of 2001, 75% of state fleet light-duty vehicle acquisitions must be AFVs; for alternative fuel providers, the requirement is 90%. Although state fleets must acquire AFVs, they are not required to use alternative fuels.

Washington is regulated as a state under EPA Act, and, until recently, it used EPA Act requirements to guide its AFV acquisitions. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency classifies the Washington metropolitan area as an ozone non-attainment area; motor vehicle emissions are the primary cause of this air pollution. The city increasingly

has come to see the use of clean-burning AFVs as a way to mitigate its air quality problems. In 2004, the Washington City Administrator's Office enacted a policy requiring 90% of the city government's light-duty vehicle acquisitions to be AFVs.

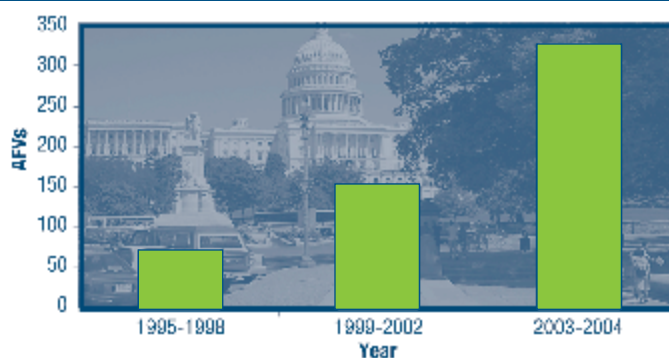
"We support being more energy independent, but our major concern is the environment," says Ron Flowers, Fleet Management Administrator with the Washington Department of Public Works, which is responsible for fueling all city government vehicles. "The environment is a substantive issue to the people of Washington because they understand the impact of air pollution on respiratory problems and overall quality of life."

Of the city's fleet of 5,500 vehicles, 55% are light-duty vehicles and 329 are AFVs. Most of the AFVs are light-duty vehicles. Two thirds are compressed natural gas (CNG) vehicles, and one third are flexible fuel vehicles (FFVs), which are capable of fueling with gasoline or any mixture of gasoline and ethanol up to E85 (85% ethanol, 15% gasoline). The city's parking enforcement service is one of the largest AFV users. About 90% of light-duty parking enforcement vehicles are AFVs, mostly dedicated CNG Honda Civics.

100% Alternative Fuel Use

Ninety-eight percent of the city's fleet fills up at 13 Department of Public Works fueling stations. Alternative fuels are available at two of the stations. Fueling at the stations is controlled by an E.J. Ward card key system, which the city established in 2001. Every city vehicle has a card key that allows it to fuel. Keys assigned to AFVs only allow fueling with alternative fuels. This system has resulted in virtually 100% fueling of AFVs with alternative fuels, including fueling of FFVs and bi-fuel natural gas vehicles (vehicles capable of fueling with gasoline or CNG). Flowers estimates that the city fleet uses more than 350,000 gasoline gallon equivalents of alternative fuel annually.

Washington's AFV fleet has grown rapidly since 1995.



Source: Washington, D.C., Department of Public Works



Reaching Out

Developing partnerships has enabled Washington to expand the reach of its alternative fuel efforts. “A number of communities in the metropolitan area have taken major steps toward increasing their alternative fuel use, often independent of any outside funding,” says Flowers, who chairs the Metropolitan Council of Governments Alternative Fuels Committee.

This committee is developing a “green policy,” a template to guide Metropolitan Council of Governments members toward instituting a major commitment to alternative fuels and environmental improvement. The committee also offers workshops on topics such as alternative fuel technology, availability of AFVs, and alternative fuel legislation. It hosts a public program at least once a year; in 2004 the program educated the public about hybrid electric vehicles, hydrogen vehicles, and AFVs. Washington and the Metropolitan Council of Governments also collaborate on alternative fuel efforts with the U.S. Department of Energy’s Clean Cities initiative.

Keys to Success

Strong leadership from city government and public support have been vital to Washington’s success. The mayor, city administrator, city council, and other city officials have been active in alternative fuel policy. Emphasizing the environmental benefits of AFVs has strengthened public support. Creating positive exposure for alternative fuel technologies has also helped. For example, parking enforcement personnel have become highly visible ambassadors for the alternative fuel program and have improved public acceptance of AFVs.

Strong government and public support help secure funding, but it’s important to be proactive as well. Flowers recommends aggressively seeking resources such as grants to start a program then seeking continued funding from the

government. In 2004, Washington obtained a grant from the National Ethanol Vehicle Coalition to install E85 tanks and equipment. Another grant, from the U.S. Department of Energy and Washington Energy Office, funded installation of a CNG fuel dispenser as well as alternative fuel promotional and educational materials.

Another key to Washington’s success is its focus not only on acquiring AFVs, but also on ensuring alternative fuel use. “I learned early on that if you did not move people toward using alternative fuels, their habit was to fill up with gasoline,” Flowers says. Washington purchases dedicated AFVs when possible and uses its card key fueling system to enforce 100% alternative fuel use in its FFVs and bi-fuel vehicles.



Parking enforcement vehicles serve as alternative fuel ambassadors.

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Looking to the Future

In addition to acquiring 90% of its light-duty vehicles as AFVs—above and beyond its state fleet requirement of 75%—Washington is seeking opportunities to use heavy-duty AFVs such as refuse trucks, dump trucks, and street sweepers fueled with CNG or biodiesel. It is also working to establish CNG fueling at privately owned stations. This would give city vehicles more fueling locations and improve the public’s access to alternative fuels. “Being the nation’s capital, we have a great responsibility to set the tone for the nation,” says Flowers. For more information, contact Flowers at ronald.flowers@dc.gov.

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