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Four “dirty” transit buses to be recycled into mobile renewable energy education labs

LANDOVER, Md. – Metro (Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority) will donate the last of its dirtiest emissions transit buses today to Biodiesel University, a nonprofit affiliated with the University of Maryland dedicated to providing hands-on renewable energy experiences and to inspiring students to pursue careers in science and technology.

The four buses will be recycled into mobile teaching laboratories and will travel to schools, colleges and public events in the Washington, D.C. region and beyond.

“I’m pleased the last of our dirtiest emissions buses will find new life as not only environmentally friendly vehicles but also as mobile classrooms where students can learn about ways to create a greener environment,” said Metro General Manager John Catoe.

Metro’s more than 1,500 bus fleet consists of compressed natural gas, hybrid-electric, and advanced technology diesel buses, which run on ultra-low-sulfur fuel. Older diesel buses have been retrofitted to meet Clean Air standards. The transit agency’s comprehensive plan to reduce bus emissions also supports testing of new technologies for possible future implementation.

“The mobile labs we are building will be part classroom, part hands-on science center, and part theme park ride, packaged in a field trip that comes to you” said Biodiesel University founder and executive director Dan Goodman. “Our collective future depends, in part, on our ability to
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inspire the next generation of scientists and technologists to innovate solutions to the huge energy and environmental issues we face. Metro's donation gives us the foundation on which to build the first labs in our fleet, and we are deeply grateful for their generosity and vision."

The labs will also educate visitors on the sustainability issues of food versus fuel, the carbon cycle, unintended economic consequences, pollution, and land and water use.

Each lab will include a hands-on feedstock section, where visitors learn about dozens of renewable sources for biodiesel and compare the benefits and tradeoffs of each one. A processing section will allow visitors to crush beans and seeds and extract their oil. An onboard state-of-the-art biodiesel processing unit will manufacture up to 250 gallons per day. This fuel will power the mobile lab as well as other vehicles and equipment at the sites it visits. Students will use real-world analytical equipment to test the chemical properties and quality of the fuel. An applications section will house exciting biodiesel-powered demonstrations including a lamp, stove, generator, fuel cell, hot air balloon, water cannon, remote-controlled model car to highlight the characteristics and responsible uses of biodiesel. The roof of the mobile labs will support an algae farm and a jet engine.

The labs will be the 'greenest' mobile labs in the world: powered by sustainably-produced biodiesel and lubricated with vegetable-based biodegradable motor oil, hydraulic fluids and greases.

Students from regional colleges and universities, including the University of Maryland and the Maryland Institute College of Art, have been designing the mobile labs and their contents since late 2006 as part of a multi-institutional collaboration. The first lab is projected to be operational by the end of 2008.

About Biodiesel University: Biodiesel University is about growing three things: renewable energy knowledge, environmental sustainability mindsets, and inspiration for careers in science and technology. We use biodiesel as the tangible example of a renewable energy technology to accomplish our mission. Affiliated with the University of Maryland's Dingman Center for Entrepreneurship, Biodiesel University is nonprofit, pro-sustainability, and feedstock and process agnostic. Learn more at: www.biodieseluniversity.org

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