



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF  
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

79 Elm Street  
Hartford, CT 06106-5127

For Further Information Contact:

Joseph Foutz, (860) 424-3088

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**P R E S S R E L E A S E**

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## **Department of Environmental Protection Kicks Off Pilot Program to Reduce Diesel School Bus Emissions**

The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) today kicked off a new regional initiative to reduce diesel emissions in Connecticut. The **Clean School Bus Program** is a pilot project in DEP's overall efforts to address diesel emissions from school buses. Using a program that will look at cleaner fuels and new technology to reduce harmful bus emissions, the pilot is expected to significantly reduce risk exposure to children and improve regional air quality. The Clean School Bus program was announced today at the Stanton Elementary School in Norwich, the city where the pilot program is targeted.

The Clean School Bus Program will be implemented throughout the Norwich school system and will include improvements to many of the school buses in the fleet used by elementary, middle and parochial schools in the city. Implementation of the program is targeted for the 2002/03 academic year, with buses being adapted over the upcoming summer months to use the low sulfur fuel and make mechanical improvements to trap small and large particles before they are emitted into the air. Results of the pilot project will be used to promote the DEP's Clean School Bus initiative into a statewide program for the future.

"Diesel emissions are a risk to both human health and the environment," said DEP Commissioner Arthur J. Rocque, Jr. "Reducing diesel emissions is part of the DEP's overall plan to improve statewide air quality in Connecticut. This pilot effort to reduce diesel school bus emissions in Norwich dovetails with other emission reduction efforts already in effect such as the school bus Anti-idling policy."

The Clean School Bus pilot program in Norwich will combine a multi-faceted approach including low emission fuels, state-of-the-art pollution control features, tail pipe testing and student monitoring to evaluate improved air quality on the bus, around passenger loading areas, and in the classroom. A public outreach and education campaign on the new program will be conducted locally for teachers, parents and students in the Norwich school system.

"The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection and the City of Norwich are to be commended for their efforts to reduce diesel exhaust from school buses," said Robert W. Varney, regional administrator for EPA's New England Office. "This project will establish a model for other communities to follow to reduce pollution from the school buses that drive our children to school every day."

Funding for the pilot project was made available through a Supplemental Environmental Project (SEP) resulting from the settlement of an enforcement action against a Norwich metallurgical facility. SEP projects may serve in addition to monetary penalties as the basis for a consensual settlement of an enforcement case. Through the \$250,000 SEP, the DEP will fund the mechanical improvements to the bus fleet and subsidize the City of Norwich for the increased 15¢ per gallon charge to purchase the necessary low sulfur fuels for the 2002/03 school year.

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The Clean School Bus initiative dovetails with the implementation of the DEP's anti-idling policy for diesel school buses which addresses idling at the school and during morning start-up at the garage. The new policy, which is voluntary, includes turning off buses immediately upon reaching their school destinations and idling no longer than necessary in the morning to bring the buses to proper operating temperature and to defrost windows.

"Connecticut's bus companies are committed to the health and safety of their passengers," said Robin L. Leeds, Executive Director of the Connecticut School Transportation Association (COSTA). "We understand the importance of reducing air pollution and welcome the opportunity to do our part by actively participating in both the anti-idling program and this new Clean School Bus initiative."

The DEP plans to coordinate this pilot program with the Northeast States for Coordinated Air Use Management (NESCAUM), a non-profit organization which represents the eight Northeastern states on air quality issues, and the Uncas Health District, serving the City of Norwich, to establish a monitoring program for the development of base-line data needed to gauge effectiveness of the program. The collaborative effort will provide portable air monitors to effectively gauge the real-time air quality as students ride the bus, move through the loading and unloading process, and while they are in the classroom. Classrooms can also be vulnerable to fluctuations in air quality resulting from the proximity of air intake vents to bus idling areas. Teachers, students, parents and local home/school associations will be the targets of a public outreach campaign conducted by the Uncas Health District.

"The Uncas Health District is pleased to work in partnership with the Norwich schools, DEP, the bus company, NESCAUM, and DMV in seeking to reduce particulate emissions from the diesel fuels used by school buses," said Arthur Cohen, Director of Health, Uncas Health District. "The District will oversee the monitoring of the health effects of this project, and will conduct outreach to school parents and children, and the general public. This initiative's effects on the public's health, and particularly the health of school children, are likely to be very favorable. This partnership will provide a valuable and practical model for diesel fuel particulate reduction by other school systems around Connecticut."

"This is a particularly important project because it ensures that our children's learning environment is not detrimental to their health," said Coralie Cooper, NESCAUM's Director of Mobile Sources. "The Norwich program is one of the first in the region to demonstrate that school buses can be extremely clean while maintaining engine performance and efficiency."

Over the summer months, the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), will oversee the installation, inspection and compliance of new pollution control equipment installed as part of the program. Technical staff and inspectors of the DMV will work with area bus companies to make necessary mechanical improvements and conduct inspection operations, with the first fleet of retrofitted buses available for the September 2002 start of the school year.

First Student Inc., the bus company that serves Norwich, will start the 2002/03 school year with the retrofitted buses which will use the combination of low sulfur fuels, oxidation catalysts and particulate filters. The new technologies are expected to reduce hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide by approximately 70 percent, and fine particulates are expected to be reduced by as much as 90 percent.

"Diesel emissions, which are emerging now as a national issue, have long been an important element in Connecticut's plan to improve air quality. Connecticut stands ready to use this program to gather the base-line data necessary to make meaningful reductions in the level of diesel emissions impacting our air," said Carmine DiBattista, Chief of DEP's Bureau of Air Management. "The Norwich community provides an element of synergy in the development of this pilot program because of past environmental violations by an area business which have impacted local air quality."

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