



Biodiesel bus rolls into Market Square

By Genevieve Giambanco
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PORTSMOUTH - "Every time we turn, stuff falls off the shelves," Jon Overman said jokingly, one of 12 Project BioBus road-trippers sacrificing a college semester to travel cross-country in a converted school bus that runs on biodiesel.



Several students from Middlebury College in Vermont hang onto the outside of their colorful school bus, powered by biodiesel fuel, during a stop in Market Square early Friday morning.
Photo by [Rich Beauchesne](#)

The students are promoting the fuel as a better, safer and just plain economically comparable alternative to diesel fuel.

The 1990 GMC school bus, which cost \$3,500, functions as a deluxe dorm room, complete with electrical outlets, audio speakers and a kitchen and lounge area.

Stuff shakes a little, said Thomas Hand. "It's a work in progress," he added.

The juniors and seniors from Middlebury College in Vermont parked their painted bus at 8 a.m. on Friday in front of Breaking New Grounds, drank some coffee, talked with locals and then drove off through Market Square as the North Church bell tolled the 10 o'clock hour.

As a group, the students formed Project BioBus, a nonprofit organization.

The students are "going to schools and colleges to integrate biodiesel into their institutions, and getting students and faculty involved," said May Boeve, one of the students.

The students said the fuel has many uses, such as for powering heaters and generators and bus fleets.

Every student has their own strength, but "it's very much a team project," said Julia Proctor.

The team make presentations to encourage institutions to get in touch with their local biodiesel distributors and to inspire high school and college students to start their own advocacy clubs for biodiesel fuel.

"Basically it's an educational trip," Boeve said.

Biodiesel is an EPA-approved, vegetable-oil-based fuel that can be used only with diesel engines. Blended with diesel in any ratio, or used alone, biodiesel is a better lubricant than diesel fuel or gasoline, the students explained.

So, using it can reduce maintenance costs and permit more time between oil changes, the students added.

Biodiesel and diesel also have a similar flash point, the lowest temperature at which the fuel can be used for combustion, said Boeve.

Ned Raynolds, senior program officer for Clean Air-Cool Planet - a Portsmouth-based nonprofit organization dedicated to finding and promoting solutions to global warming - welcomed the Middlebury students Friday morning.

Raynolds works with businesses, colleges and municipalities to persuade them to operate in a way that reduces emissions of greenhouse gases. Also a City Councilor, Raynolds was influential in arranging for Project BioBus to visit the square.

"I figured this would be the perfect place in downtown," he said. "Biodiesel is possible. Biodiesel is happening."

Raynolds said the Keene Public Works Department operates its garbage trucks on biodiesel.

"They do smell better," he said.

Four days into a three-month-long trip, the students had many facts memorized.

The air inside a school bus is eight times more dangerous than the air outside, Rolerson and von Hasseln said. Rockingham County, they said, ranks in the top 10 percent of counties in the U.S. with the greatest risk of cancer primarily due to diesel exhaust.

These facts and others, said Bill Burtis, communications manager for Clean Air-Cool Planet, can be found through a link at www.scorecard.org, where information on local pollution levels is posted.

Wind currents carrying dirty metropolitan air from the southern and western areas of the country stop when they hit the ocean, Burtis said. The dirty air hangs over New England, contributing to the incidence of asthma and other ailments.

Most people think New Hampshire has clean air, said Burtis, but it doesn't. "Air quality is a big health issue for us," he added.

Burtis said biodiesel burns cleaner than other fuels.

"I know that the particulates in biodiesel are almost not an issue at all in terms of respiratory ailments and cancer," he said.

Several of the students said they own diesel-fueled Volkswagen Jettas. Hand bought his 1998 Jetta last year. "It runs great, I haven't had any problems with it," he said. "It gets 50 miles to the gallon."

ON THE NET To learn more or to see the BioBus road map through 22 states, visit www.projectbiobus.com.

To learn about the status of the air in Rockingham County, visit www.scorecard.org/env-releases/hap/county.tcl?fips_county_code=33015.