

Daily Bruin

University of California, Los Angeles

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Fuel additive tested in UCLA shuttle buses

By Wendy Witherspoon, Staff Writer

The UCLA community is breathing cleaner air now than it did three months ago, because of an experimental fuel additive used in the Hudson General shuttle buses operating around campus.

Since February, the fleet of 19 diesel buses which provide transit to off-campus parking lots have been using the OMSTAR D1280X additive in an experiment to test its pollution-reducing ability.

The additive works in diesel vehicles by cleaning up the engine. It aids in the combustion process, making the engine run more efficiently and cutting down on exhaust fumes. The additive was tested in the fleet of buses to determine its performance in large vehicles in real-world conditions.

Harold Alves, manager of maintenance services for Hudson General, has announced a "definite reduction in exhaust smoke" from the already up-to-standard engines.

Although Alves said the results "were not nearly as dramatic as some of the results of other testing done of the product," he said the results may be explained by the fact that the company's fleet maintenance is of high standards.

The particles emitted from diesel engines are harmful to the human body and also reduce visibility. Proponents of the additive believe it could be an efficient way to improve air quality in the Los Angeles Basin.

Although diesel-powered vehicles are about 35 percent more fuel-efficient than gasoline-powered ones, the public is concerned about the damage done to the environment, said Los Angeles City Councilman Richard Alatorre at a press conference held last February to kick off the experiment.

According to Hudson general's supplier of the additive, Richard Skaags, the additive "doesn't cost anything because it pays for itself (in increased gas mileage)." He said it is currently being used in the American Presidents Line shipping company and is endorsed by the California Truckers Association.

"What all this is pointing to is to eventually see the additive used all over Southern California," said Brad Sales, press secretary for Alatorre.

According to Sales, it will be a long time before the many tests that still need to be done on the additive are completed, and it is uncertain when the product will be available to the public. "We want to test to see if it reduces other emissions," he explained.

There is also a form of the additive being tested for gasoline-powered rather than diesel-powered vehicles.

Jean Fuson, a reporter for CBS, wanted to do an editorial on the fuel additive and experimented with it in his own car, a 1970 T-Bird. "It had more zip, ran smoother and started better," he said. "I noticed a 5 to 6 percent increase in gas mileage."