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Clinton Kicks-Off Biofuel Initiative

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CLINTON

Clinton Kicks Off Biofuel Initiative

The Town of Clinton recently began a program to use biofuel products in town buildings and vehicles, highlight its benefits, address some of its myths, and get the entire community involved in its future use.

Spearheaded by resident Patsy Kumekawa, the new Clinton Biofuel Initiative is composed of First Selectman William "Willie" Fritz, Superintendent of Schools Jack Cross, The Morgan School Principal Keri Hagness, Henry Carter Hull Library Director Maribeth Breen, Finance Director Rosemary Hanson, Department of Public Work (DPW) Director Peter Neff, Hale Hill Biofuels business manager Donna Worst, and Greenleaf Biofuels distribution manager Charlie Beebe.

"We want to make this a community effort and a collective enterprise where everyone can contribute in a small way," said Kumekawa.

Biodiesel fuel is touted as a cleaner burning, domestic, and renewable fuel that can be refined from vegetable oil, animal fats, or waste grease. Bioheat B20 is a blend of 80 percent low sulfur No. 2 home heating oil and 20 percent biodiesel. Criticisms of biofuel include allegations that it raises food costs and decreases food availability and wildlife habitat and that farming biofuel crops consumes more fossil fuel energy than it produces.

The goal of the initiative, said Cross, is to begin using B20 fuel in three town buildings that include town hall, the library, and the high school and to run half the bus fleet with the product, as well.

The reason the town cannot use pure biofuel is due to the product's cold flow properties, said Beebe. At 30 degrees or colder, the vegetable oil begins to cloud and will turn solid in very cold weather. Biofuel companies are working to solve this issue for the future. In warmer climates, cities and consumers are using 100 percent biofuel to run their vehicles and heat and cool their homes.

Hale Hill Biofuels recently

delivered a 1,000 gallon loaner tank to the Clinton bus depot. It is in the process of being installed and inspected by the DPW director and fire marshal.

"We should begin fueling the buses with B20 in about three weeks," said Worst.

Cross said once the program is underway, the group will

begin to collect data on things such as mileage, maintenance, and savings for the vehicles and the buildings.

Both Worst and Beebe said there are many myths

circulating about their products. One of them is that by using any type of biofuel in a vehicle, it will ruin the engine and destroy the equipment.

"One of the toughest groups to convince are mechanics," said Beebe.

Beebe explained that a small joke was played on the employees of the Connecticut DPW last year. They were approached by state officials with the idea of using B20 fuel in their vehicles.

"They immediately said, 'No,' stating that the biofuel would clog up the engines and ruin the equipment," said Beebe.

Unbeknownst to them, they had been using B20 fuel for more than one year.

"They had to admit that the vehicles were running smoothly with less maintenance issues," he said.

In fact, says Beebe, residents may be using biodiesel fuel all along and not know it.

"There can be up to five percent of biodiesel fuel in products without the manufacturer having to disclose this information to consumers," he said.

Another myth about biofuels is that if one were to convert to their use, an entire change to the heating system or engine is required.

"Not true. The change can begin immediately," said Worst.

Kumekawa agreed, as she recently changed her home heating fuel from oil to B20.

Another myth is that anything "greener" is expensive.

"Biofuels are never the most expensive or the least expensive," noted Worst, saying the savings are seen in so many other ways, including less maintenance of vehicles and heating systems, as well as long-term health and environmental savings.

A Hale Hill Biofuels handout states that by switching to biodiesel for home heating and in on-road and off-road heavy duty vehicles, the state saved at least \$20 million in averted health care costs.

The biggest savings are those for humans and the environment, Worst said. Biodiesel is safer for people to breathe, helps preserve and protect natural resources, burns cleaner and produces less soot buildup, doesn't smell, doesn't produce cancer-causing pollutants that also cause respiratory illnesses, and reduces emissions.

"It is produced in American from vegetable oil grown by American farmers," said Worst.

Another goal of the Clinton Biofuel Initiative is to involve school students in an array of educational opportunities and programs.

"I can see taking this to an outreach program, community service, internships, and a grease collection program in an effort to allow the students have ownership of this," said Hagness. "It is all about making our world a greener place." Breen said that not only will the library be heated and cooled by B20 fuel; it can become a central community meeting place to support the initiative.

"I compliment the town of

Clinton," said Worst. "No other community has approached a project like this in an all-encompassing manner as they have."

Look for upcoming program information on The Clinton Biofuel Initiative, such as the screening of the movie Fuel, as well as a kick-off event in future issues of the Harbor News.
