

Filter grant to help bring most vehicles up to speed Emissions control

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By 2010, Athens residents should breathe a little easier after the University of Georgia and Athens-Clarke County finish retrofitting buses and other diesel vehicles with newer emissions filters.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency announced Friday that the local government and university would collect \$1.7 million in economic recovery funding to install the filters on 239 vehicles and save or provide 30 jobs.

Mechanics could install the new part onto buses, garbage trucks and fire engines in as early as 30 days, drastically improving air quality throughout the region, said Ryan Adolphson, director of the UGA Faculty of Engineering Outreach Service. The emissions control device, which will be manufactured domestically, will eliminate more than 100 tons of pollution a year, including 95 tons of carbon monoxide, 14 tons of hydrocarbons and eight tons of particulate matter, Adolphson said.

For an average city bus, the filter would reduce the amount of harmful particulates by 60 percent, he said.

"It will have a substantial air-quality impact. ... It will reduce the number of tons of particulates in the atmosphere in the air that we breathe in, not just at the bus stops, but countywide."

A portion of the money will go to fix government vehicles 100 miles south of Athens in Washington County.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates more than 11 million diesel vehicles do not meet the EPA's newest clean air standards, but are allowed to remain on the road for the next 20 to 30 years.

Only two of Athens' 28 city buses meet 2007 emissions standards. The others, 2004 models, will be retrofitted with the pollution control device, said Terry Ferguson, Athens Transit's maintenance administrator.

"One of the things it's going to improve, it's going to add quality control," Ferguson said. "Pretty much any engine that's built, it's certified for emissions

for the year of that vehicle. By utilizing the grant, we'll be able to take it up to 2007."

Twelve of UGA's 47 buses already have exhaust filters, leaving 35 buses with engines made from 1995 to 2005 and eligible for an upgrade, said Ronald Hamlin, UGA's manager of campus transit.

Diesel exhaust contains toxicants, carcinogens, reproductive hazards, endocrine disruptors and sooty particles known to cause respiratory disease, heart disease and death, according to the Clean Air Coalition.

While air quality in Athens has improved in recent years, the state Environmental Protection Division has recommended Clarke County be placed alongside 27 other counties on a list of communities that do not meet tougher air-quality standards next year.

Although the poor rating seems likely for Clarke County, the newer filters not only should improve the air, but could have some impact as the county is held to a higher standard, Hamlin said.

"We want to be as clean as we can be," Hamlin said. "We operate in an area that's on the edge of being proclaimed noncompliant with air quality, and so we just want to do our part to make sure we clean up our act. ..."

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