CONNECTICUT SCHOOL DISTRICT SAVES $200,000 WITH PROPANE-AUTOGAS-POWERED SCHOOL BUSES

A PROPANE CASE STUDY

John Dufour is the president of All-Star Transportation, a family-owned school bus contractor serving Litchfield, New Haven, and upper Fairfield counties in Connecticut. Two years ago, Dufour acquired 51 Blue Bird Propane Vision Type C school buses to service Torrington Public Schools, which includes seven high school and middle schools in Torrington and provides services to nearly 5,000 students.

MAKING THE CASE FOR PROPANE

Torrington Public School's transportation contractor first proposed making a switch to alternative fuels in 2012 when the district was looking to replace some of its older diesel school buses.

"We're always looking at new products and things we can bring to the table for our customers," said John Dufour, whose company, All-Star Transportation, maintains the propane autogas buses for Torrington. "With fuel being such a big expense for schools, any advantage we can provide that will save schools money, they're open to it."

All-Star Transportation proposed propane autogas as the best solution for the district because of propane's low upfront cost and the school's high fuel usage. According to Dufour, the district uses more than 140,000 gallons of fuel each year. With propane autogas, the school system pays less than $2.00 per gallon, compared with diesel, which costs upwards of $3.50 per gallon.

"Once we ran the numbers it was a no-brainer," Dufour said. "We made them a deal on the buses and they signed a new seven year contract. To date, Torrington Public Schools has saved about $200,000 in fuel costs per year, money that can now be spent on teachers, supplies, classrooms, and all of the other things they're working on."

Torrington Public Schools set a fixed price for propane through a fuel contract with its local propane provider, and All-Star Transportation installed the refueling infrastructure on its property.

COMPANY

All-Star Transportation,
Torrington Public Schools
Torrington, Connecticut

CHALLENGE & SOLUTION

When All-Star Transportation, a local school bus contractor in Connecticut, proposed that Torrington Public Schools replace its older diesel buses with new propane-autogas-powered buses, the projected $200,000 annual fuel cost savings convinced the school's board of education to vote yes.

RESULT

- Startup costs with propane were significantly more affordable when compared with other alternative fuels.
- Torrington Public Schools purchases propane autogas for less than $2.00 per gallon with a private fuel contract.
- The Blue Bird Vision propane autogas buses start instantly and perform better than diesel models in Connecticut's frigid winters.

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All-Star Transportation installed a single dispenser and two 1,980 gallon tanks on its property to refuel the buses. They also trained two staff members to handle refueling the propane autogas fleet.

"Roush CleanTech came in and helped do refueling and maintenance training with our staff and that was it," Dufour said. "The local propane provider comes with a bobtail truck every other or every third week and fills up our tanks. We've had absolutely no issues at all, and, we didn't have to make any alterations to our facilities and shop either."

DISPELLING THE COLD START MYTHS

A popular misconception fleet managers have about propane autogas is that the fuel doesn't perform in cold weather. However, today's liquid injection technology dispels those myths, and Dufour reports that the buses have performed not only for his staff, but for others in the Northeast, too.

"I made phone calls to contractors currently running them in upstate New York and talked to people in climates worse than ours, and they all had no issues with cold weather performance. The propane-autogas-powered buses even started better than diesels."

A majority of the 700 Class C buses All-Star Transportation operates run on diesel, which has to be treated during the winter with additives so the fuel doesn't gel. With propane autogas, Dufour says they've saved both time and money because the fuel doesn't require any additional work.

"With propane, you just continue your normal routine and it's the same no matter the temperature. In fact, the propane buses start almost instantly, even when it's zero or ten below. With the diesels, we sometimes bring staff in early just to ensure they start."

Another benefit with propane autogas buses is that they heat up immediately, even when they're not moving. With a diesel bus, Dufour explains it can take 20 minutes of drive time before they warm up; that's an important consideration, especially with Connecticut's tough standards on idling.

"With diesel buses here in Connecticut, three minutes is idling time by law, and you'll pay big fines if you do it because they really monitor it. We don't worry about idling with the propane buses because they generate heat quicker than the diesel buses and in the cold we can cycle them on and off for three minutes to heat them."

IT PAYS TO BE GREEN

All-Star Transportation has been running its Blue Bird propane autogas buses with Torrington Public Schools for just two years. In that short time frame, Dufour and his team have noted many benefits with the fuel, including the potential for less maintenance.

"We think we'll see long term maintenance savings with propane autogas," Dufour said. "We still service the buses at the same manufacturer-recommended intervals, but the volume of oil we use compared with diesel is less because the engines run so clean. Our guys work on diesel buses in the Torrington shop for other schools in the area, and any one of them will tell you they would rather work on the propane buses. They're that easy."

Dufour believes there is real opportunity for Connecticut to invest in more propane autogas school buses, and publicity from the state's two current adopters, Torrington Public Schools and Shelton Public Schools, has piqued the interest of a lot of business managers and districts.

"I would really like to do this in more of my towns and I think the market is there. I've had a lot of phone calls, especially from other districts. It will be interesting to see if some of the other bigger schools start bidding it — that's when it will really take off."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about propane autogas and the Propane Education & Research Council, visit **propane.com**.

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The Propane Education & Research Council was authorized by the U.S. Congress with the passage of Public Law 104-284, the Propane Education and Research Act (PERA), signed into law on October 11, 1996. The mission of the Propane Education & Research Council is to promote the safe, efficient use of odorized propane gas as a preferred energy source.