

Bio buses hit the road

WSD school buses first in Manitoba to use biodiesel



Lansdowne principal Chantelle Deslauriers-Gray welcomes kindergarten students as they board one of the Division's biodiesel buses.

The Winnipeg School Division has rolled out four school buses that are the first in Manitoba to use biodiesel fuel.

Division chair Kristine Barr announced the move at a special news conference at École Lansdowne on Feb. 28. "Our overall goal is to increase air quality and create a better environment for students and families today and in the future," Ms. Barr said, adding that the initiative "will help us do our part to reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

Refined mainly with oils from farm crops, biodiesel is a cleaner burning alternative fuel that can be used in any conventional diesel engine. The four buses use a biodiesel fuel derived from soybeans.

"We wanted to get a viable product that was environmentally friendly," said Division transportation supervisor Pat Shuttleworth, who spearheaded the project. "We have to look at sustaining our world right now."

She said the biodiesel buses have been performing well to date.

"The drivers are giving us positive feedback on the particulates from the tailpipe exhaust—it's a cleaner smell," she said. "I'm very pleased with the initiative so far."

In the coming months, the Division will continue to monitor the overall performance of the buses. Further buses will slowly be phased into the Division's fleet starting this fall, as more biodiesel filling stations become available. The buses are currently fueled at a Manitoba Hydro filling station.

The biodiesel initiative was carried out with the support

of Division secretary-treasurer René Appelmans, Manitoba Hydro, the provincial department of education, citizenship and youth and the department of science, technology, energy and mines. Provincial incentives, including tax relief benefits and grants, were beneficial to the project's development.

"I'd like to congratulate the Winnipeg School Division on this decision—it takes leadership," said Jim Rondeau, minister of science, technology, energy and mines.

The province is currently working to expand its biodiesel production capacity, using Manitoba crops and local refineries. Mr. Rondeau said the switch to biodiesel was a "triple win" situation, noting the positive effect it has on the economy, the environment and agriculture.

Ken Thomas, manager of fleet services for Manitoba Hydro and chair of the Manitoba Provincial Biodiesel Board, said a similar initiative with Manitoba Hydro vehicles had gone well.

"We are confident that this test period will be successful—and will lead to the expanded use of biodiesel in school buses throughout the Division, and eventually throughout the province," he said.

Prior to the news conference, Lansdowne teacher Kyla McDonald's Grade 5/6 class researched biodiesel and alternative fuels, as well as creating posters for the event.

"Biodiesel is good for the environment—and sometimes it can even smell like food," said Grade 5 student Dusty Lee Beaudry.

Mr. Rondeau said he was impressed with the Lansdowne students' knowledge.

"When I was talking with the students, they actually knew about biodiesel and the environmental benefits—they knew what they were talking about," Mr. Rondeau said. "It's nice to see the young people understand how we have to move in the future."



Division chair Kristine Barr (left) and transportation supervisor Pat Shuttleworth.



Jim Rondeau, provincial minister of science, technology, energy and mines, addresses students and media at the news conference.