

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

The Island University

6300 Ocean Drive, Corpus Christi, TX 78412 (361) 825-2420 FAX (361) 825-2620

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CONTACT: Gretchen Arnold 361.825.3070; Steve Paschal 361.825.2336

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi's Pollution Prevention Partnership Retrofitting School Buses to Reduce Emissions Children who ride buses exposed to higher levels of harmful pollutants

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas – The Pollution Prevention Partnership at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi is retrofitting more than 150 area school district buses with equipment to reduce harmful emissions through a Clean School Bus Project funded by a Supplemental Environmental Project grant from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

The Clean School Bus project is designed to reduce children's exposure to diesel exhaust from school buses by retrofitting the buses with diesel oxidation catalysts and closed crankcase filtration systems that reduce emissions of air pollutants from exhaust pipes and crankcase breather tubes. By reducing ambient air pollution, passengers will have cleaner air to breathe.

"Children are especially sensitive to air pollution because their respiratory systems are still developing," says Gretchen Arnold, director of the Pollution Prevention Partnership. "Recent studies suggest that children while traveling on school buses are potentially exposed to significantly higher concentrations of pollutants than what is measured in a community's outdoor air."

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the 24 million children who ride on school buses nationwide each day are more susceptible to air pollution from diesel vehicles because they breathe 50 percent more air per pound of body weight than adults. While school buses are idling, exhaust accumulates in and around them exposing the students to respiratory problems, lung damage and increased risk of lung cancer.

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Page 2, Pollution Prevention Partnership Retrofitting School Buses

“Although new school buses are required to meet cleaner emissions standards, a significant percentage of school bus fleets are older model buses equipped with diesel engines manufactured between 1990 and 1999,” points out Arnold. “Budget constraints prohibit school districts from purchasing new buses or retrofitting their existing older fleets in order to reduce the diesel emissions.”

The Pollution Prevention Partnership is coordinating with school districts and procuring equipment and installation services to retrofit older buses. The school buses are being fitted with diesel oxidation catalysts which reduce harmful pollutants by absorbing them into a honeycomb canister that converts the pollutants into water, cutting hydrocarbons and carbon dioxide by 60 to 90 percent. New closed crankcase ventilation systems designed to return blowback gases to the engine intake for subsequent combustion are also being installed to help reduce hydrocarbon and carbon dioxide emissions.

Emissions of particulate matter are measured before and after the conversion. Expected reductions in exhaust emissions are 20 percent for particulate matter, 40 percent for hydrocarbons, and 30 percent for carbon monoxide.

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