

HOW BIOFUELS BECAME THE GREEN

CHOICE FOR ONE NORTH TEXAS FLEET

Summer 2020

For fleets, cost and dependability remain at the forefront of making important vehicle and fuel decisions. Thankfully, City of Southlake is taking the initiative to ensure their fleet remains a regional leader in sustainable operations, prioritizing both financial and green choices.

The City of Southlake began exploring alternative fuel options and other vehicle technologies starting in 2006, when then Fleet Coordinator, currently Purchasing Manager, Tim Slifka came onboard.

“For my first vehicle order, I ordered vehicles with flex-fuel capabilities before we even had the capaCity for it. The Flex-Fuel engine was a no-cost option and having a past background in Clean Cities when I was in Illinois - I knew eventually that we would implement alternate fuels here in the City,” says Slifka.

In 2008, Southlake completed its first purchase of hybrid electric vehicles, and in 2012, the City upgraded its fuel system utilizing a grant made available

through DFW Clean Cities and the US Department of Energy, and brought in ethanol (E85) and biodiesel (B20) biofuels to its fleet.

Slifka says available grant funding made the difference in making the City's transition to E85 and B20 easy.

“At that time, our current fuel tanks were at the end of their life cycle, and we were having trouble with our fueling system, and needed to replace everything all at once,” says Slifka. “One funding source we found was a DFW Clean Cities grant with the US Department of Energy. The City was awarded over \$60,000 in grant funding through DFW Clean Cities, and were able to convince our Executive Team utilizing this grant was in the best interest of the City and the community by bringing alternate fuels to the City.”

Today, the Southlake fleet uses a full range of vehicles -light, medium and heavy-duty - which use E85 and B20 fuel blends, including its emergency service vehicles.



SOUTHLAKE'S FLEET BY THE NUMBERS

97 

2019 Biofuel Vehicles

3 

2019 Hybrid Vehicles

51000 

gallons of E85 used in 2019

5000 

gallons of B20 used in 2019

2019 

DFW Clean Cities
Gold Fleet Recipient

"We have some of our ambulances and fire trucks running on the B20 blend, and our police units are using E85," says Slifka. "Everyday vehicles, if able, are also using B20 blend or E85 alternate fuels. All of our vehicles are expected to be running on alternate fuels if they can."

Although challenges have been few and far in-between, Slifka says that the B20 biofuel blend has posed a few issues - and ones which are mostly weather-related.

"Initially, when we introduced the B20 blend, we had some fuel filter issues, but nothing really major," says Slifka. "One issue we had was when it got cold, we had fuel gelling issues. That only happened once but now we don't use the B20 blend in the winter months." However, Slifka added, other entities have used the B20 blend year-round with no issues.

When it came to originally completing the grant process to obtain Southlake's alternative fuel fueling station in 2012, Slifka was fortunate enough to come into his fleet management position with previous alternative fuel experience, but for new fleets, Slifka offered important advice.

"It's all about teamwork. If you don't have the purchasing experience or grant experience, reach out to someone who does," says Slifka. "Talk to your purchasing staff, because each City and each business has someone who does their buying for them, and they'll know all the rules. Also work closely with your Clean Cities group! Ours was instrumental in getting us through the grant process! Lots of time spent on the phone and through emails with them getting everything right."

Slifka added that, for fleet managers, having City leadership and elected officials on your side can make the process of transitioning to alternative fuels and other vehicle technologies much more painless. For Slifka, that meant having the support of the Southlake City Council.

"Get your end users and your leadership team on your side up-front," says Slifka. "Because pushing out a change - any change, is easier if you have the buy-in. It always makes the transformation process easier."

Overall, Slifka and Southlake's experience with biofuel has been overwhelmingly positive, and Southlake's use of biofuel has even earned the City recognition from the Dallas-Fort Worth Clean Cities Coalition, earning one of the coalition's first Gold Fleet Recognition in 2019. "Being recognized as one of the first Gold Fleets from DFW Clean Cities was a great honor. Bringing the Gold Fleet award back to the City we were able to show, 'what we are doing matters,'" says Slifka.

To learn more about alternative fuels and funding opportunities, visit www.dfwcleancities.org. *The Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) Clean Cities Coalition is hosted within the NCTCOG. DFW was one of the first regions to be designated as part of the Department of Energy Clean Cities initiative in 1995 to reduce transportation energy use and improve air quality.*