

U.S. Department of Energy's Clean Cities Program from MotorWeek 2833

JOHN DAVIS: As more alternative fueled vehicles and clean technologies enter the mainstream, the path to our clean driving future is becoming more well-defined. But we didn't get to this point overnight: It has taken years of work by unsung environmental heroes in groups like the U.S. Department of Energy's Clean Cities program, to build awareness and demand for clean, efficient transportation alternatives. Well now those efforts are paying off – at the gas pumps and on the streets.

Created in response to the Energy Policy Act of 1992, the Clean Cities program is a voluntary consortium of government agencies and private companies working together to improve air quality and reduce our reliance on petroleum at both local and national levels.

To accomplish that lofty goal, Clean Cities started forming a network of independent community-based coalitions a little over 15 years ago, each tasked with encouraging the use of cleaner alternative fuels in place of conventional petroleum fuels in their area. Starting with Atlanta and building to just 6 cities that first year, Clean Cities has now grown to nearly 90 coalitions in 45 states.

SAM SPOFFORTH, CLEAN FUELS OHIO: It's natural gas, it's propane, hybrid electric vehicles, dedicated electric vehicles, biofuels – we really cover the whole range and we do a combination of working with fleets, working to get more availability of all these fuels and we do education and policy work as well.

DAVIS: Federal competitive grants have helped kick start these efforts, but over the past 15 years, the Clean Cities program has leveraged those government dollars for maximum input at an incredible ratio of 25 to 1, with over a billion dollars invested by over 5,700 stakeholders to date – car makers, utilities, local governments, commercial fleets, fuel suppliers and transit agencies.

Clean Cities coordinators provide technical information and financial resources to fleet managers, encourage fuel stations to offer clean alternatives and educate the public on ways to reduce petroleum use.

And the results are equally impressive: 580,000 new AFV's on the road, the equivalent of over 2 billion gasoline gallons of petroleum displaced through alternative fuels and clean technologies, idle reduction, and over 6,000 stations now offering alternative fuels like E85, biodiesel, natural gas, propane, and even Hydrogen to the public.

JEFFREY RADER, ATLANTA CLEAN CITIES: One of the greatest early wins that we had was the ability to get our transit system locally, Metro Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority, MARTA, to commit to taking their fleet, first a small part of the fleet, but ultimately over 400 buses to be CNG.

DAVIS: And Atlanta is not alone. Transit fleets across America are switching to Natural Gas and other clean non-petroleum based fuels. In 1997, only 6 percent of U.S.

buses used alternative fuels. Since then, that number has jumped to 20 percent and over half of those can be credited directly to efforts by Clean Cities coalitions.

To provide essential technical support, The U.S. Department of Energy conducts research, compiles mountains of alt fuel data and presents this information in print and online: The Alternative Fuels and Advanced Vehicles Data Center has info on laws and incentives, background on all types of alternative fuels and locator tools for finding and mapping fueling stations. The fueleconomy.gov website is the source for real-world fuel mileage data, air pollution ratings and safety data to help car buyers choose the cleanest vehicles that fit their needs.

But despite its tremendous growth, Clean Cities is still very much a grassroots operation at heart, celebrating victories one ribbon-cutting at a time, and relying on each other for much needed support.

KELLIE WALSH, CENTRAL INDIANA CLEAN CITIES: I'm the Executive Director. It's kind of me, myself and I are the staff. We have a board of 11 that I report to and bounce the big things off of and keep up to date as to what's going on and so forth. But, on the in and out daily activities, it's myself – and that's where working with the Department of Energy and working with NREL and the consultants and all the groups that support Clean Cities, makes it feel like I have a staff of 20 or more, because I can really utilize their experience and their expertise in helping me pull together the things that I do there in the coalition.

DAVIS: The idea of government empowering local citizens to be agents of change for the common good is an innovative approach that has exceeded all expectations. Aside from wartime patriotic campaigns, no other government program in recent memory has fostered as much enthusiasm for a single cause.

TOM GROSS, FORMER DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY, U.S.

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY: The Clean Cities ability to bring together a lot of committed, passionate people – people who were passionate about making changes in transportation energy is key, and Clean Cities early on became a focal point for making that happen.

DAVIS: The Clean Cities mission is far from over, and DOE's National Clean Cities Director Dennis Smith sees even more potential ahead.

DENNIS A. SMITH, NATIONAL CLEAN CITIES DIRECTOR, U.S.

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY: The reason that Clean Cities had been successful for so many years, and I think it will continue to grow into the future, is that people really understand how important it is for us to no longer be addicted to oil and to dirty petroleum based fuels for their cars and trucks. Working through their Clean Cities coalitions they are beginning to realize that they can band together in their communities and that they can choose to use these cleaner alternative fuels and even more efficient vehicles. And you know what? They're making a difference!