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Ferries switching to cleaner fuel before 2010 federal deadline

By [LISA STIFFLER](#)
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Washington State Ferries is taking the lead nationally by switching to cleaner-burning diesel fuel, state and federal officials said Friday.

All of the ferries are switching to a low-sulfur fuel within the next year, and tests are being done on select boats with ultra-low sulfur diesel and biodiesel, a renewable fuel made from plant products, such as soybeans or recycled cooking oil.

The cleaner fuels and engine upgrades mean that the fleet will release fewer airborne particulates associated with lung disease; less sulfur dioxide, which makes acid rain; and less carbon dioxide, a key contributor to global warming.

"Air pollution is a major concern in our state; global warming is a concern for the entire planet," Gov. Gary Locke said at an announcement of the pollution-control initiative in Seattle.

The ferry system is setting an example for the whole marine industry, he said.

Earlier this month, the Environmental Protection Agency approved rules requiring significant pollution reductions for marine vessels, locomotives and farm and construction equipment -- so-called non-road engines.

The regulation requires refiners to cut the sulfur in the fuel for those engines to 500 parts per million -- the current level of sulfur in automobile and truck fuel -- by 2007. By 2010, the engines must switch to cleaner diesel fuel, containing 15 ppm sulfur.

Diesel fuel for non-road engines currently contains sulfur at levels as high as 3,400 ppm.

"We'll remember when they took the black puff out of diesel smoke," said John Iani, the EPA's regional administrator.

Cleaner fuel carries a higher price tag, however. Low-sulfur fuel costs about a penny more per gallon; the ultra-low variety 7 cents more. Biodiesel fuel costs an extra quarter per gallon.

Funding from Seattle City Light, the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency and the EPA will help cover the ferry system's higher fuel costs, officials said. The Puget Sound ferries consume about 18 million gallons of fuel a year.

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