

Alternative Fuels At A Crossroads

By Roy Willis

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Everywhere you turn today, there is a new commercial or news story giving the impression that alternative-fuel cars, trucks, and buses are taking over the roads and sending their gas-guzzling predecessors the way of the dinosaur. That could not be further from the truth.

The truth is that globally, of the more than 1 billion vehicles on the road, those running on alternative energy – bio-fuel, electric, hydrogen, natural gas, propane autogas, and so on – make up less than 2% of the total automotive fleet. Of the estimated 60 million vehicles being built worldwide this year, the overwhelming majority will be fueled by oil. That means that most cars are fueled the same way as the Model T's that rolled off Henry Ford's assembly lines.

Diving even deeper into those statistics, when you analyze the number of alternative fuels competing for sales, what's left is a volatile alternative-fuel marketplace where the good guys often fight each other to gain market share among early adopters or favored status among policy makers.

Rather than putting more alternative-fuel vehicles on the road, we're spinning our wheels, with alternative fuels getting too little traction beyond their small share of the world's vehicles.

Like other representatives of major alternative fuels, I do my part to tell decision makers about propane autogas' affordable infrastructure, American-made fuel supply, and new technology that cuts emissions compared with gasoline and diesel vehicles. Other alternative-fuel advocates make the case for CNG, electric or bio-diesel. But we are all coming from the same side. We want to find ways to make the U.S. more energy independent and greener while also helping consumers who have had to struggle with fluctuations in oil prices for decades.

There is no silver bullet that can free our country from dependence on foreign oil. What alternative fuel providers need to do is move

beyond intramural jockeying and embrace the reality that there is no one-size-fits-all fuel or vehicle that can meet the nation's diverse transportation needs and reduce the use of gasoline and diesel.

The road we're on has its share of potholes. High-profile bankruptcies of electric car companies, such as Fisker and Coda and battery maker A123, left taxpayers holding the bag on big loans that will never be repaid and

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damaged public perception of alternative-fuel vehicles as a whole. Government programs that attempt to pick winners are not on the highway to success.

That is not to say that government can't help advance cleaner transportation. The long-term challenge of displacing oil in transportation will not be met with short-term thinking but with a long view. The two-year extension of incentives for alternative fuel use and deployment of refueling infrastructure, passed during the recent fiscal cliff negotiations, will help get existing technologies on the road. However, their short-term duration provides scant encouragement to invest in the next generation of cleaner cars and trucks that can take years to bring to market. This on-again, off-again approach to incentives diminishes the effectiveness of policies that actually work.

Policies that marshal the most powerful force in the market – consumers – work. Reducing fuel taxes, offsetting the incremental cost of vehicles, and supporting deployment of refueling infrastructure bring alternative-fuel vehicles to market because they address the primary economic hurdles that fleets and other consumers face in moving away from oil-based fuels.

Government can also help with continu-

ing education efforts like the Department of Energy's Clean Cities program. For 20 years, Clean Cities Coalitions across the country have done the important work of introducing consumers to alternative transportation technologies, and they remain a vital part of the nation's drive to reduce oil consumption and related emissions.

Greater use of alternative fuel vehicles can make transportation cleaner and improve America's energy security. It's time we hit the accelerator.

Roy Willis is the President and CEO of the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC), an organization devoted to supporting propane safety, training and R&D of new propane-fueled technology. Mr. Willis has nearly five decades of experience in the energy industry, working in the oil and natural gas fields of Louisiana and later serving as a senior congressional staffer in Washington. He has been PERC CEO since 1998. For more information about Roy, visit his blog at <http://energygumbo.com> or write to him as roy.willis@propane.com.

Flame King Helps Light Win Over Darkness

Rabbi Levitansky is the Director of Chabad of Santa Monica, California and is recognized as a valuable leader in his community. Chabad is the largest Jewish organization in the world with more than 2,500 centers. Not long ago, Rabbi Levitansky made national headlines when a homeless man with mental illness tried to plant a homemade bomb in his center and blow it up several years ago.

Every year during the holiday season for the last 20 years, Rabbi Levitansky and his local Chabad organization set up 60 large menorahs in high-traffic areas in and around Santa Monica. Each menorah consists of eight branches and a large center branch that is used as the pilot. Wanting to use a green gas and get maximum impact, Rabbi Levitansky uses Coleman propane lanterns. Each night the lanterns are lit using a disposable 1-lb. cylinder that is disposed of when empty the next morning.

Since the symbol of the menorah is light winning over darkness, and that if you fight for truth ultimately you will prevail, our menorahs have been a source of inspiration for our community.

Several years ago the Rabbi approached **Sam Newman**, CEO of Flame King, for help with the expense of buying the 1-lb. disposable propane tanks. Mr Newman, through his contacts at the Coleman Company, was able to get a half pallet donated. Last year, after Flame King launched a 1-lb. refillable cylinder, Sam Newman approached the Rabbi and offered to donate the 1-lb. disposable cylinders for this season.

Being the Rabbi in Santa Monica, an environmentally conscious community, and himself realizing the impact of the disposable cylinders, Rabbi Levitansky decided to explore the 1-lb. refillable option. Flame King agreed to donate the refillable 1-lb. cylinders and was able to get the propane donated as well from Pick Up Propane [the largest independent propane company in California].

Now, as a result of the Flame King initiative, a program that used to cost Chabad of Santa Monica \$9,240 annually will only cost them \$1,640 on an annual basis. Not to mention that 2,640 cylinders won't end up in landfills or require hazmat processing in order to recycle the material.

"It has been a very difficult last couple of years as people are really hurting because of the economy," says Rabbi Levitansky. "During this time we have not scaled back our public menorah lightings but on the contrary we have been increasing them in numbers every year.

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"We will now have \$7,500 a year extra in our budget to put into our other programs such as feeding the homeless and our youth educational programs," says Rabbi Levitansky.



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