

Chuck Renken, auto mechanic lead at St. Cloud State University, pumps E85 fuel Monday into one of the school's cars.

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Environmentally friendly fuel fills 17 SCSU vehicles

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St. Cloud State University wants to cut back on using gasoline.

Officials are working to phase out regular fuel from its fleet of vehicles and start using E85, a blend of 85 percent ethanol and 15 percent petroleum, as the primary fuel. Ethanol is made by cooking corn and sometimes other plant materials. It is added to gasoline to increase oxygen in the fuel and make it burn cleaner.

"It's a cleaner-burning fuel, and ethanol is a renewable fuel," said Jim Williams, director of buildings and grounds management. "It helps the local economy, and we reduce our dependency on foreign oil."

Seventeen of the university's 22 vehicles are flexible-fuel vehicles that run on any combination of E85 and gasoline from a single tank. The university plans to buy more flexible-fuel vehicles as it rotates older vehicles out of the fleet. The vehicles are available to faculty, staff and students for university-related travel.

Minnesota's 14 ethanol plants can produce more than 300 million gallons of ethanol a year, said Tim Gerlach, director of outdoor air programs for the American Lung Association of Minnesota. Almost all gasoline is blended with at least 10 percent of ethanol.

Flexible-fuel vehicles and E85 have grown more popular in the past few years, Gerlach said.

More than 85,000 flexible-fuel vehicles are registered in the state, and almost 3 million have been sold nationwide, Gerlach said. In Minnesota this year, close to 1 million gallons of E85 have been sold, compared with 550,000 gallons in 2001 and 320,000 in 2000. More than 2.5 billion gallons of gasoline are sold in Minnesota every year.

At St. Cloud State, E85 is stored in a 6,000-gallon tank in the ground. A new 2,000-gallon tank was built to hold regular fuel. It cost about \$10,000. Half of that cost was offset by a forgivable loan from the Lung Association.

Another benefit of E85 is it costs 15 to 25 cents less per gallon than regular fuel, Gerlach said. E85 also has an octane level of 105, which could give some vehicles a 5 percent performance boost. Regular unleaded fuel has an octane level of 87 or 89.

"All in all, it's a smart investment for us to (use) a renewable fuel we produce right here," Gerlach said.

The University of Minnesota has an E85 pump on its campus, but St. Cloud State is the first university in the state to take "such a dramatic step" in its switch to E85, Gerlach said.

"We feel it's the right thing to do," Williams said.

Flexible-fuel vehicles

This is a list of flexible-fuel vehicles capable of running on E85, based on information available □Nov. 1.

Look for a decal under the fuel door.

Ford Motor Company

- Selected 2002-2003 4.0L Explorers.
- Selected 1999-2003 3.0L Ranger trucks.
- Selected 2000-2003 3.0L Taurus sedans and wagons.
- Selected 1995-1999 3.0L Taurus sedans.

DaimlerChrysler

- All 1998-2003 3.3L Caravan minivans.
- All 1998-2003 3.3L Voyager minivans.
- All 1998-2003 3.3L Town & Country minivans.
- All 2003 2.7L Chrysler Sebring Sedans.
- All 2003 2.7L Dodge Stratus Sedans.
- Selected 2003 3.3L Dodge Caravan Cargo.

General Motors

-- All 2002-2003 5.3L V8 Suburbans, Tahoes, Yukons, Yukon XLs.

-- Selected 2002-2003 5.3L V8 Sierra and Silverado trucks.

-- All 2000-2002 2.2L Chevy S-10 pickups.

-- All 2000-2002 2.2L Sonoma pickups.

Isuzu

-- All 2000-2002 Isuzu 2.2L Hombre pickups.

Mazda

-- Selected 1999-2002 Mazda 3.0L B3000 pickups.

Mercury

-- Selected 2002-2003 4.0L Mountaineers.

-- Selected 2001 3.0L Sables.

Information

For information on E85 or flexible fuel vehicles, call (800) 642-LUNG or visit www.cleanairchoice.org. To learn about E85 nationwide, call (877) 485-8595 or visit www.E85fuel.com.