



BIODIESEL in the Big Apple

BY BETHANY BARATTA

To keep its reputation as the city that never sleeps, New York City needs the fuel to keep it up and running. For this, the city relies on biodiesel.

“I could not get through every day of my work life if biodiesel wasn’t effective,” says Keith Kerman, the city’s chief fleet officer. He manages a municipal fleet of 30,000 vehicles, the largest municipal fleet in the U.S.

The city began using biodiesel in 2005. Since then, the city has expanded its use of the homegrown fuel. Just in the last seven years, the city has used about 105 million blended gallons of biodiesel in its on- and off-road vehicles and equipment.

“We pursue biofuels because as a practical matter it can lower emissions,

and it’s a sustainable and renewable source of energy,” Kerman says. “New York City is reducing emissions and supporting America’s farmers; it’s a great partnership.”

The city uses 5% biodiesel blends (B5) in the winter and B20 the rest of the year. With the city and statewide push for lowering carbon emissions significantly, Kerman understands that increasing its blends of biodiesel will help them reach their goals.

“We are now on the cusp of biodiesel being a blend to being the product,” Kerman says. “We were the first city to use biodiesel in its fleet in a big way, but we want to be first in fleet at B20.”

That presents a tremendous opportunity for biodiesel and U.S.

soybean farmers, says Iowa Soybean Association President Tim Bardole.

“It doesn’t matter if we are selling our products to New York City or to Beijing, we have to sell our product,” says Bardole, who farms near Rippey. “We need to get soybean prices back up so they are profitable to grow.”

Demand for soybean oil, which makes up about 50% of the biodiesel produced in the U.S., has helped support soybean prices. On average, biodiesel adds \$1 to every bushel of soybeans grown on farms in Iowa and the U.S. Soybean oil prices have increased more than three-fold, growing from 7 cents per pound to 23 cents per pound due to growing demand for soybean oil for use in biodiesel.

Carbon reduction goals

Carbon reduction goals for the city and state are helping push higher blends of biodiesel, says Eric Dorcean, associate deputy commissioner for fleet services at New York City’s Department of Transportation (DOT).

“It’s all about reducing greenhouse gas emissions,” Dorcean says. “Initially, there was a little bit of fear in using biodiesel, but we’re putting more and more of it in our fleet.”

Among the department’s jurisdiction: all five boroughs of New York, 26,000 miles of streets, “and pretty much everything that touches that—sidewalks, traffic lights, signs, etc.,” says Dan Malone, Deputy Chief of Vehicles and Equipment for the New York City DOT.

The department is also solely responsible for clearing the snow in Times Square and its pedestrian plazas and greenways and working with other agencies to prepare for and host numerous events throughout the year. Times Square draws an estimated 50 million visitors per year, and it’s one of the world’s most visited tourist attractions.

The DOT also owns and operates the Staten Island Ferry and supplies vehicles and equipment for its maintenance. Biodiesel hasn’t found its way into the fuel tanks of ferries yet, but research continues on the

best blends to make that happen.

The goal within the city’s fleet department is to reduce emissions 50% by 2025 and 80% by 2035. Ideally, Dorcean says, the majority of the fleet would operate on electricity.

But the department is also realistic, Kerman says.

“We have an incredible amount of infrastructure that’s not going anywhere anytime soon, which uses diesel fuel,” Kerman says. “We have 10,000 fleet units that use diesel fuel. There aren’t electric options in design or concept yet for much of this type of equipment.”

Running on 100% electricity isn’t feasible — at least yet, says John Huber, president of the National Oilheat Research Alliance.

To do so, the U.S. would have to triple the amount of electricity made here and eliminate all coal, natural gas, etc.

“We’re decades, maybe even hundreds of years away from doing that,” Huber says.

Instead, fleets can use higher blends of biodiesel to help them reach their emissions goals, he says.

“Consumers are starting to realize there are better products available to use, rather than petroleum and fossil fuels,” says Donnell Rehagen, CEO of the National Biodiesel Board. “That’s our sweet spot.”

Contact Bethany Baratta at bbaratta@iasoybeans.com.



Eric Dorcean, associate deputy commissioner for fleet services at New York City’s Department of Transportation, says the city has used biodiesel with great success.



New York City has used 410 million blended gallons of biodiesel in the last seven years to fuel its fleet and heat municipal buildings.

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