LOCAL NEWS

Pickens aims to expand propane fleet

Vehicle conversions intended to help environment, save money

By Julie Howle
STAFF WRITER
jhowle@greenvillenews.com

Some Sheriff's Office patrol vehicles could hit the streets in Pickens County, leaving less of a mark on air quality and the county's wallet.

Pickens County plans to apply for a grant to convert about 50 county vehicles, mainly Sheriff's Office patrol cars, to propane from gasoline.

"It's a cost savings," said Pickens County Councilwoman Jennifer Willis. "The cost of propane is a minimum of 30 percent cheaper than gasoline."

And the move can also mean good things for the air because propane burns more cleanly than gasoline, she said.

"It reduces our emissions, which is another step for us in terms of trying to make sure that we are attaining the clean air quality standards that we need to," Willis said.

County Administrator Chappell Hurst said the $200,000 grant for the switch would be from stimulus money and said the county should know in August if it will receive it.

The grant pays $5,400 per vehicle to convert from gas to a propane usage, Hurst said. The county wouldn't have to put any money toward the project.

"The motors last longer," Hurst said. "They have more power because propane burns much cleaner and hotter."

And he said that when gasoline was $4 a gallon last year, the equivalent of propane was somewhere around $2.10 to $2.20.

He said the vehicles can still switch over and run on gasoline if needed and that officials have already completed a successful test with the Sheriff's Office.

The conversion would be in addition to Pickens County's biodiesel project, which Hurst said involves transforming used vegetable oil into biodiesel fuel to be used in vehicles, off-road machinery and equipment.

He said the propane and biodiesel efforts combined would cover about 80 percent of the county's vehicles.