

County takes steps to cut carbon footprint



JOHN C. STEVENSON / Staff

Olin Howard, Pickens County biofuel manager, makes adjustments Friday to the equipment that converts used vegetable oil into biodiesel fuel.

Vegetable oil greases wheels in Pickens

Biodiesel plant used to fuel vehicles is saving money, sparing air, officials say

By John C. Stevenson
STAFF WRITER
jstevens@greenvillenews.com

EASLEY — Congratulations, Pickens County: You've lost 1 million pounds of carbon emissions.

It may sound like a weird line in a spam e-mail, but not only is it true, it's proof that Pickens County means business with one of its "green" forays: a biodiesel production plant that fuels more than 20 county vehicles and pieces of heavy equipment, saving the

county around \$50,000 a year and reducing the county's carbon footprint.

Pickens County will be honored Monday night when it is presented with the 2010 Spare the Air award, given annually by the state Department of Health and Environmental Control to recognize "leaders in South Carolina who have taken the initiative to commit to implementing an idea to improve air quality," said Debra Briggs-Monroe, a DHEC envi-

ronmental health manager.

"They've developed a collaborative effort between local restaurants and schools, to get them involved," Briggs-Monroe said. "They've reduced an estimated 1 million pounds of carbon emissions, which is great, and they serve as a model for other counties and municipalities that are interested in making a difference."

To produce biodiesel fuel, the county collects used vegetable oil from a number of local restaurants, as well as cafeterias at each of the district's public schools.

See OIL on page 5B

OIL

FROM PAGE 1B

The waste oil is processed in a plant constructed by the county for less than \$200,000, according to County Administrator Chap Hurst, and then used in a variety of diesel-powered vehicles, including the long-haul trucks that carry county waste to a landfill in Georgia.

Not only is the county saving money and working green, Hurst said, there's been another benefit: The project has county employees fired up.

"It's given us a new way to look at things and to see what we can accomplish," Hurst said. "I think the fact that these guys took something that was highly technical and took a lot of skill in the beginning to learn how to do it and they've accomplished that — it's really done a lot for the morale of my folks out there."

The county's biodiesel project has drawn attention from other governments in the state, as well as from Clemson University, but Hurst said, "I think they're kind of afraid to tackle it because it's not something you can just jump into."

Some municipalities in the Palmetto State have

found an alternative to "jumping into" biodiesel production.

Winnsboro-based Midlands Biofuels LLC and Columbia have launched the Southern Fried Fuel Program, a cooperative agreement that gives Midlands Biofuels access to waste vegetable oil from the capital city, while the city is expected to soon start purchasing biodiesel fuel back from the company.

"We approached them about collecting oil, and the city came back to us and said 'if y'all are going to use this oil to make fuel, can we buy fuel from you,'" said "Bio" Joe Renwick, who owns Midlands Biofuels

with Brandon Spence. "We haven't gotten an order yet, but we're in production and ready to deliver."

Renwick said the company also supplies fuel to Fairfield County in a similar arrangement.

Biodiesel is a fledgling industry, but one Renwick wants to see catch hold in the Palmetto State.

"The real benefit is about creating green jobs, growing a new industry in South Carolina," he said. "We want you to buy fuel from us because you believe in what we're doing and because you won't be buying fuel produced in another country or even another state."