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FleetAnswers hosted a discussion for utility fleet directors, managers and analysts to collectively address the topic of Green Fleet Policy with a targeted focus on policy creation, including the methodology behind the acquisition of alternative fueled vehicles and specific strategies that make up a formal, corporate approved green fleet policy.

Most importantly was discovering whether or not utilities have policies for their fleet that address either or both alternative fuel vehicle acquisition and/or green fleet strategies. While formal policy is the outcome, the steps taken to develop such a policy, including the major decision points that led one organization to their conclusions was of particular interest.

The outcome of this discussion was the discovery that ***only a few formal, corporate approved green fleet policies are present within the utility industry.*** These policies are found mostly within organizations with fleets operating on either the East or West coast, where emission and GHG reduction regulations are the most rigorous - encouraging organizations to develop complying policies.

While few policies exist within the utility sector, ***many if not all utility fleets are engaged in at least some efforts to achieve specific green objectives and goals.***

West Coast Leaders

Fleet Director, Hector Madariaga, spoke on behalf of Sempra Energy, whose California utilities, San Diego Gas & Electric Co. and Southern California Gas Company, serve more than 20 million consumers. Hector discussed his fleet's green strategy in terms of long-term goals and objectives, driven by strict government regulations in the State of California. With increasing pressure to abide by emission regulations, Sempra Utilities engage in numerous practices to achieve their number one goal: reducing their fleet's greenhouse gas (GHG) footprint. Nearly every decision made to achieve this goal deals with reducing fuel, which ultimately reduces costs. With approximately 1,000 CNG vehicles and 10% of their entire fleet running on natural gas, Sempra Utilities is a leader in green fleet initiatives.

Sempra Utilities has and continues to invest their time and efforts in reducing costs to make funds available for the acquisition of alternative fuel vehicles. Specific efforts including idle reduction (*California has a 5 minute cap on idling*) and the Euro-popular *Eco-driving* made possible through Swedish programs that focus on improving driving practices are among the numerous efforts taking by this California based fleet to reduce their GHG footprint.

Hector also highlights the use of GPS devices in fleet vehicles to help identify personal and incidental use of vehicles which ultimately targets unnecessary fuel usage.

When it comes to vehicles, this fleet organization tries to stick with one manufacturer for the acquisition of new hybrid and CNG sedans, to reduce the time and complexity involved in training a large staff of technicians. The types of AFV's acquired is primarily driven by longevity - a concern that seeks to understand if new vehicles will still run and operate efficiently 7 or 8 years after they are purchased.

Sempra is among many of the West Coast fleets adopting the numerous emerging technologies available and able to help fleet's run greener. While CNG vehicles make up a large part of Sempra's fleet, they are also looking at hybrid trucks and considering the purchase of bio-gas as additional efforts to reduce emissions. Similar to Eco-driving, the use of bio-gas is another popular European green strategy.

An additional industry leader in the effort to incorporate Green Fleet Policy is Pacific Gas and Electric - recognized for its award-winning Sustainability Policy, which contains a matrix that measures a variety of factors that gauge the success of reaching specific green fleet objectives including amount of fuel displaced and GHG footprint. Another engaged participant in the world of green technology, PG&E is considered to have the largest natural gas fleet in the country. Their fleet also consists of over 900 Bio-Diesel heavy duty vehicles.

PG&E is moving towards a vehicle strategy that includes electric-drive systems and on-board Electric Work Management Systems (EWMS) - electrification of booms and other on-board systems. PG&E supports the development of Extended Range EVS (EREVs) that are equipped with an on-board generator in addition to their plug-in feature.

Dave Meisel is the Director of Transportation at Pacific Gas & Electric.

Strategically Safe

While California fleets represent the vanguard of the Green Fleet movement, ***fleets from all over the US are engaged and interested in developing strategies and policies to improve corporate environmental perception and reduce their GHG footprint.***

While Consumers Energy (Jackson, MI) does not have a formal, corporate approved green fleet policy, they do have a steady focus on complying with EPA regulations when it comes to both vehicle acquisition and fuel reduction says Fleet Manager, Scott Weber. Some of the green fleet strategies used by this fleet include the use of flex fuel as well as sending non-centrally fueled vehicles home with their high mileage operators. Consumers energy does participate in the stimulus where available - including the acquisition of hybrid service trucks.

The overall strategy for their fleet is to move at a conservative pace without being financially burdened. Echoing similarities to Consumers is the fleet run by Gary Kelly at Tucson Electric Power (Tucson, Arizona). They too, do not have a formal policy, but are making efforts to engage new green technologies for their trouble trucks and other high mileage units.

Summary

While only a few utility fleets are serving as pioneers in the development of formal green fleet policies, most, if not all are engaged in efforts that will help reduce their GHG footprint. For utilities like PG&E and Sempra Utilities, government regulation encourages if not forces these organizations to develop some kind of rigorous plan for adhering to emission regulations among other regulations affecting the fleet. More flexible planning is seen by other utilities whose more cautious approach includes green fleet strategies like idle regulation and decreasing fuel consumption.

Overall, the industry at large only appears to have ***a few, yet powerful leaders who are rapidly adopting and implementing new green technologies with long-term, strategic goals outlined in a formal policy.*** Many fleets outside of this group are still somewhat unsure about the right path to choose to implement greener solutions for their fleet. It is clear, however, that government regulations, like those found in California, appear to be the common factor among fleets who do have formal, corporate approved green fleet policy.

All utility professionals who participated in this discussion can be contacted through FleetAnswers.com.