Alliance AutoGas
POWERED BY PROPANE

CASE STUDY: **SPARTANBURG REGIONAL HEALTHCARE SYSTEM**

BACKGROUND

Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System (SRHS) is an integrated healthcare delivery system that provides care for the individual from birth to end of life. The system is self-funded and a political subdivision of South Carolina, meaning it receives no funding from community tax dollars. The healthcare system serves four South Carolina counties and two North Carolina counties.

SRHS has the only hospital fleet in the nation designated as a general mass transit provider, and services Spartanburg County. Since July of 2017, the fleet system has received Federal Transit Administration Urban and Rural grants to provide transportation, in addition to hospital funding. The Transportation Services division provides more than 800 clients each day with on-demand, curb-to-curb transportation. Their fleet of 48 buses are fully compliant with handicapped accessibility guidelines.

PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

In 2013, SRHS began looking for an alternative fuel option for their fleets to help their region meet SC emissions criteria. The Spartanburg urbanized area is a nonattainment area set by the EPA, located between the larger urban areas of Charlotte, NC and Greenville, SC. The fleet system used diesel several years ago, and considered a biofuel motor, but they were displeased with overall performance options from that motor. They moved to gasoline vehicles, but kept looking for a more comprehensive solution. SRHS Director of Transportation Services, Jimmy Riley says, "The hospital had, from the president down, been looking at several different emissions reducing programs for our fleets, and autogas came out as the fuel of choice."

WORKING WITH ALLIANCE AUTOGAS

SRHS started working with Alliance AutoGas in March of 2013. It took about a year to complete the paperwork due to hospital legal requirements. To meet the legal requirements, AAG representatives addressed each data point from SRHS fleet system in their proposal, thus proving the comprehensive nature of the autogas system and support. Once the contract approval concluded in 2014, the actual vehicle conversion process and infrastructure installment took just a few months. The hospital chose to convert cutaway (wheelchair equipped bus) and courier vehicles first. AAG technicians performed the conversions on-site in one bay of the hospital's existing garage, and trained SRHS fleet technicians to perform any future maintenance. AAG also installed the necessary tanks and fueling infrastructure in 2014 so that the fleet was operational.

Jimmy Riley says, "We've had super service from AAG. Anything we need, they help. Any minor maintenance incident during the installations brought out AAG techs the same day!" One of the major benefits Riley experienced in working with AAG is that "they send us safety training modules for our drivers so they can understand the benefits and safety of propane, removing any concern with using an unfamiliar fuel."

Jimmy Riley, Director of Transportation Services - SRHS

FLEET STATISTICS

FLEET TYPE:
Patient and Public Transportation

AAG PARTNER:
Blossman Gas
(www.blossmangas.com)

AUTOGAS VEHICLES IN FLEET: 14
2 F-150
3 E-350
9 E-450

TOTAL ESTIMATED ANNUAL SAVINGS: $15,500

ANNUAL USAGE:
27,588 gallons of autogas

ANNUAL MILEAGE (per vehicle):
187,000 miles

AUTOGAS FUELING: Onsite

TIME OPERATING ON AUTOGAS:
5 years

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RESULTS AND AUTOGAS BENEFITS

Riley says, "Autogas is a very reliable fuel. We have never had a vehicle breakdown as a result of using this fuel which is important considering our success as a fleet system depends on reliably and efficiently transporting people to medical and other services they need." SRHS fleet vehicles have an autogas tank range of about 115-120 miles, which will complete some routes. Other routes are longer, and drivers are happy to have the benefit of switching from autogas to gasoline (AAG systems are bi-fuel) so that they do not have to stop to refuel.

One major bonus of using an alternative fuel for their vehicles is that autogas and the refueling process are independent of electricity. This system allows SRHS to have an alternative fuel supply in the event of a disaster. Riley says, "Should power go out, we can still fuel vehicles and do what we need to do. Our on-site fueling stations are filled by our local Blossman Gas branch with fleet vehicles that also operate on autogas, so we can count on them to keep getting fuel to us when we need it." In 2018, the hospital fleet provided emergency transport during Hurricane Florence.

MOVING FORWARD

Riley shares, "When we first talked about converting to autogas, the price of gasoline was going up. By the time we got through the purchasing paperwork, contracts, etc., the price of gas was back down. But we knew we still wanted to go with propane because of the instability of gas pricing." SRHS has plans to convert each new vehicle acquired. Riley says, "It's a win-win for us due to reduced emissions coupled with financial savings and on-site fueling convenience."

Right now, the fleet is split in two. The hospital-owned vehicles are converted to autogas. The vehicles that benefit from Federal Transit Administration Urban and Rural grants (since July 2017) are gasoline fueled. The hospital would like to see both fleets completely converted to autogas, and hope that federal regulations will clear the way for consistent use of the clean, domestically sourced fuel.