

When did you begin using E85?

The State of Minnesota began purchasing flexible fuel vehicles (FFVs) in the early 1990s. E85 fuel was not readily available through retail fuel stations at that time. We installed an E85 tank, which was used to fuel the vehicles that were based out of our location in St. Paul. We have kept the E85 tank, and we continue to use it today. It currently is the only fuel tank that we have at our facility.

How many FFVs were in your fleet at that time? How many flexible fuel vehicles are currently in your fleet?

We began with only a few FFVs. However, the number has increased significantly over the years. The Minnesota Department of Administration currently has 1,130 FFVs in the fleet. This number includes those assigned to state agencies and political sub-divisions. Some state agencies own additional FFVs that have been acquired by the individual agency. The total number of FFVs operated by state agencies is approximately 1,480.

What were the roadblocks to installing E85 and how did you overcome them?

We have experienced no unusual issues with the E85 fueling site. We treat it as you would treat a standard gasoline fueling site.

How did the drivers first react to using E85? Have their opinions changed over time?

Drivers are initially very accustomed to using gasoline as fuel in vehicles. There is generally some reluctance to trying a new and unfamiliar fuel. However, the more E85 that drivers use, the more they become comfortable with using it regularly. Initially it is very helpful to provide drivers with the benefits that biofuels offer. We try to promote the renewable, domestic, cleaner burning attributes of E85 as a vehicle fuel. Many drivers have now accepted E85 as a "normal" fuel, and feel completely comfortable using it as they have used gasoline in the past.

Have you had any problems with the fuel or the vehicles?

For several years we operated a daily rental program in which many vehicles were fueled nearly exclusively with E85. Drivers could not tell any difference between E85 and gasoline in vehicle performance or operation. If we did not tell the drivers, they were completely unaware that the vehicle was operating on E85.

We have not experienced any unusual problems with the vehicles or with the fuel. When questions have come up, the vehicle manufacturers have been very willing to help. In some cases dealerships and/or repair facilities have needed to become more familiar with E85 as an automotive fuel. There have been some isolated instances of the fuel being blamed for another type of vehicle malfunction. However, with some education and increased familiarity with E85 fuel, we are finding that misdiagnosis is happening less often.

How many gallons of E85 do state vehicles use each year?

We are estimating that the state currently uses approximately 68,000 gallons of E85 annually. This number is increasing as more retail fueling facilities offer E85 for sale and additional vehicle types are offered with FFV capability. We are also working with drivers and agencies to promote the use of E85 in state vehicles.

E85 Case Study
Minnesota Department of Administration – Travel Management Division
Tim Morse, Director
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The Governor has recently charged state agencies to reduce dependence on petroleum fuel. We are anticipating the use of E85 will dramatically increase over the coming years. Projections call for the state fleet to exceed 1.3 million gallons by 2015.

Do you have any Hybrid Electric Vehicles or other AFVs in your fleet?

We currently have two hybrid electric vehicles in our fleet. These vehicles are performing well. We have only flex fuel vehicles, and no other alternative fuel vehicle types, in the fleet at this time. We are using FFVs to meet the Energy Policy Act (EPA) requirements. Currently hybrid vehicles do not qualify for EPA credits. If hybrid vehicles are accepted as meeting EPA requirements there will be increased positive incentive to use them in the fleet. However, I expect the current emphasis will remain on FFVs for the immediate future.

Other comments?

The American Lung Association of Minnesota (ALAMN) has been a valuable partner in promoting E85 fuel for our fleet. We have successfully partnered, and continue to partner with ALAMN in our quest to use domestic, renewable, cleaner burning fuel. The Twin Cities Clean Cities Coalition (TC4) has also been very helpful in our move toward less petroleum dependence. This coalition has allowed us to learn from other members in our area, and throughout the United States, regarding what fuels are being used, and what the experience has been. We are grateful for the help we have received from both of these organizations.