

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE: 12:01a.m., FEBRUARY 13, 2006

GOOD NEWS, CITY DWELLERS MAY SOON BE ABLE TO BREATHE EASIER

Study Finds That the High-Polluting Refuse Truck Sector Is Making the Shift from Diesel to Cleaner, Quieter Natural Gas Trucks

New York, NY, February 13, 2006: Today, INFORM, the national environmental research organization, released its latest report, *Greening Garbage Trucks: Trends in Alternative Fuels Use, 2002–2005*. The study—a follow-up to the groundbreaking research presented in 2002’s *Greening Garbage Trucks: New Technologies for Cleaner Air*—finds robust growth in the use of alternative fuel refuse trucks in the US and internationally.

In the US, there are nearly three times as many refuse trucks as there are transit buses. Yet relatively little attention has been given to these vehicles, which are among the most polluting and least fuel efficient traveling our roads. There is good news, however. INFORM’s new report, authored by Senior Fellow James S. Cannon, finds that the use of cleaner, quieter natural gas-fueled trucks has been rising steadily since 2002; almost 1,500 are now in operation. The report also finds that, for many reasons, natural gas has become the fuel of choice.

A Step toward Healthier Air

“First and foremost,” Cannon said, “natural gas is a much cleaner fuel than diesel. Every morning in communities across the nation, more than 136,000 garbage trucks wend their way up and down residential streets. Heavy-duty truck and bus emissions are a primary reason why 170 million Americans are living in areas where the air quality does not meet human health standards set by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and why upper respiratory illnesses are increasing at alarming rates.” Cannon added, “INFORM has estimated that if every conventional diesel-burning garbage truck in use in the US today is replaced with a new natural gas model, one ton of nitrogen oxide (NOx)—a key component of health-threatening smog—is eliminated.” New, more stringent EPA emission standards for all new refuse truck engines come into effect in the 2007–2010 period. As Joanna D. Underwood, president of INFORM noted, “Natural gas engines have already shown they are, and will continue to be, cleaner and quieter. They not only meet 2007 standards but can already meet the coming 2010 EPA NOx standards.”

Less Noise: Improving Quality of Life

In addition to offering considerable emissions reductions, natural gas-powered engines are dramatically quieter than those of diesel trucks. This means a higher quality of life for the communities through which refuse collection trucks travel—often at night—and for sanitation truck workers; diesel

garbage trucks have been known to reach levels of up to 100 decibels, which is sufficient enough to cause permanent hearing damage. During INFORM's research, many fleet operators noted that drivers preferred natural gas over noisier, foul-smelling diesel engines.

A More Secure Fuel Source for an Essential Public Service

“Replacing diesel fuel-powered trucks with trucks powered by natural gas is a tremendous opportunity not only for cleaner air and quieter neighborhoods, but also for reducing reliance on a fuel coming from risky and unreliable foreign sources,” said Underwood. Natural gas is a fuel that is domestically plentiful in the US and Canada. She added, “Due to the start-and-stop operation of refuse trucks, these trucks average less than three miles per gallon, making them one of the least fuel-efficient vehicles on the road. Replacing one-half of the 136,000 diesel-burning garbage trucks in the US with natural gas-fueled trucks would displace almost 15 million barrels of oil each year.”

California Is Leading the Way

INFORM found California to be the clear leader in promoting natural gas refuse truck purchase and use because of the ambitious purchasing requirement programs implemented in the Los Angeles region and because of statewide economic incentives that encourage the use of alternative fuel vehicles. In California, there are 1,268 natural gas trucks in operation, a number that represents 85 percent of all natural gas garbage trucks in the country. INFORM also found natural gas trucks in New York, Texas, Massachusetts, Washington, DC, and in several European countries.

For those interested in reading INFORM's findings and recommendations or seeing if their city is operating alternative fuel garbage trucks, INFORM provides this information at http://informinc.org/ggt_project1.php.

“Changing US dependence on foreign oil is going to require changes throughout the transportation industry, but it's clear that the refuse truck sector is a practical and consequential arena of action,” said Cannon. “The use of natural gas vehicles involves refining systems for storing, transporting, and fueling vehicles with a gas under pressure. Also, investments in natural gas fueling infrastructure are investments in gaseous fuel facilities that, with added equipment, will be able to extract hydrogen from natural gas, until the day when hydrogen can be generated from water using renewable energy sources to create a fully sustainable resource.”

About INFORM

INFORM is a national, nonprofit research organization that examines the effects of business practices, technologies, and products on the environment and human health. For 30 years, INFORM has sought practical solutions to the environmental challenges of safeguarding humans and ecosystems from toxic chemicals, shifting to pollution-free transportation, and preventing solid waste. INFORM's objective and constructive recommendations have been a key resource in helping members of government, industry, environmental groups, and communities around the world make decisions that promote economic and ecological sustainability.

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