

# West Allegheny to use propane-fueled buses

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By Andrea Iglar /

West Allegheny plans to begin using some school buses fueled by propane.

Superintendent John DiSanti said March 20 that the district's bus service provider, Monark Student Transportation Corp. of Richland, plans to introduce two propane-fueled buses a year to its fleet.

Mr. DiSanti said replacing some diesel buses with propane vehicles will save money and energy while transporting students safely.

"We will be one of the first [school districts] in the region to do this," he said.

School board members voted 7-2 on March 20 to enter into a two-year agreement, effective immediately, with ProGas Inc. of Zelienople for leasing storage tank equipment and buying propane to fuel the buses.

President Debbie Mirich and board member Anne Bolind voted "no" because they wanted further safety information.

"I'm not against the propane buses for the fuel and the cost savings for the district," Mrs. Mirich said after the meeting. "I just wanted to make sure that our drivers and our children are safe."

Mrs. Mirich expected the board to receive certain crash-test information that had not been provided prior to the vote.

School board member Robert Ostrander said the district will try the propane vehicles and "keep our options open in the future."

For 10 years, West Allegheny has contracted with Monark for student bus services, including vehicles and drivers. The current contract extends until July 1, 2020.

The school district is responsible for purchasing bus fuel, and propane is less expensive than the diesel traditionally used, district officials said.

If the price of propane were to rise above that of diesel, the district would discontinue using propane bus fuel, Mr. DiSanti said.

He said there are federal incentives for propane use.

Monark will install a propane fill station at its facility, he said.

Mr. DiSanti said that Mark Schmitt, the president and owner of Monark, has extensively researched propane-fueled school buses and has indicated that "this is the most cost-effective, safest and most efficient way to go."

Mrs. Mirich said West Allegheny is the first Monark client to participate in the company's pilot program to run school buses on propane.

According to the Pennsylvania Propane Gas Association, a Harrisburg-based trade group, propane is a nontoxic, colorless byproduct of both natural gas processing and crude oil refining.

Although naturally odorless, an identifying smell is added so the gas can be readily detected.

"Propane is considered a safe motor fuel by the federal government," the group's website says.

"School buses run on propane. Propane vehicle tanks are tested to four times the normal operating pressures, and these tanks are 20 times as puncture resistant as ... [other] vehicle tanks."

The website outlines environmental advantages of propane, noting, "Propane is released as a gas and will not contaminate soil or groundwater supplies."

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