

Truckinginfo

Leading Fleet Execs Talk About 2010

By Deborah Lockridge, Editor

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A panel of trucking executives known for their innovative equipment specs say they're fairly comfortable with and even looking forward to selective catalytic reduction technology for 2010 emissions regulations, but they're not ruling out Navistar's enhanced-EGR approach.

A conference call hosted by John Larkin, transportation analyst for financial services firm Stifel Nicolaus Thursday, featured Max Fuller, co-chairman and CEO of U.S. Xpress Enterprises; Randy Marten, chairman and CEO of Marten Transport; and Harry Muhlschlegel, chairman and CEO of New Century.

All three have been to Europe for a fact-finding mission on SCR, where it's been in use for some time.

"Myself, I am actually looking forward to this," said Muhlschlegel. "The SCR, we've seen it's been proven in Europe, and we're seeing a bout a 3 to 5 percent better fuel economy." In fact, rather than doing a pre-buy, he said, his company has held off on buying trucks, using APUs to cut idling time, not only saving fuel but also extending the life of their current engines.

"The SCR technology appears to be some of the best EPA technology we've seen come to our industry in quite a while," Fuller said. "Talking to the people in Europe, talking to the engine guys, it looks like the technology is mature enough for us to start deploying - but we will deploy at a higher cost of operation."

Improved fuel economy was the main benefit of SCR cited by the three, with estimates of 3 percent to 6 percent improvement over current engines.

"I don't think you're doing to see a big prebuy, because this engine is the first that will give us a payback beyond cleaner air," Fuller said.

The big concerns were weight and cost. SCR-equipped engine may weigh as much as 400 pounds more, and that will lessen payload. The engines will also cost an estimated \$8,000 to \$10,000 more up front, Muhlschlegel said.

The distribution and storage of diesel exhaust fluid, the urea-based solution required for SCR, is not a major concern as it once was. Fuller noted that Pilot, Love's, and TravelCenters of America have all committed to offer DEF at their locations.

"We're being told it's about 2 percent of fuel usage, and it's about the same price as diesel fuel," Muhlschlegel said. "It goes into a separate fuel tank on the truck; a 30-gallon tank would go about 7,000 miles. So it's not as intimidating as it was when we first heard about it."

Marten noted that his company has so far not been able to locate an underground SCR tank, which would help control temperature issues.

After all three talked about the SCR solution, they were asked about Navistar's enhanced EGR approach to meeting 2010 standards. Marten and Fuller said they had in no way ruled it out.

"All options are on the table," Marten said, noting the main reason he was looking mainly at SCR is because that is what's offered by his two current power unit suppliers. "My father started this business with International trucks, so obviously they have a history here - so that is wide open."

"We are actually going to use some of the Navistar products," Fuller said. "Talking to the chairman of Navistar, he is totally convinced the technology they're using will be superior. I haven't received enough information to show me why he thinks they're that much superior," he said, noting that in the past, as you increased temperatures and pressures in the engine, as EGR does, you see shorter engine life. But he's willing to find out if Navistar has an answer to that problem.