

Aromas-San Juan Unified School District: The Refueling Problem of Its CNG Buses

Conducted by

Health, Education, and Welfare Committee

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**County of San Benito
Civil Grand Jury
2007-2008**

AROMAS-SAN JUAN UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT: THE REFUELING PROBLEM OF ITS CNG BUSES

SUMMARY

The Aromas–San Juan Unified School District (ASJUSD) owns 4 school buses that operate on compressed natural gas (CNG). According to the 2006-07 San Benito Grand Jury, ASJUSD was refueling its CNG buses in Salinas because neither the San Benito High School District (SBHSD) nor the Local Transportation Authority (LTA) was able to provide fast-fill refueling support on a consistent basis. The 2006-07 Grand Jury recommended the development of a better delivery service of CNG fueling to ASJUSD. This report summarizes the 2007-08 Grand Jury’s follow-up investigation of the issue of the CNG refueling of the school buses belonging to the ASJUSD.

PURPOSE OF INQUIRY

The 2007-08 Grand Jury conducted an investigation to re-examine the recommendations made by the 2006-07 Grand Jury concerning the delivery service of the CNG fueling of school buses belonging to the ASJUSD.

METHODOLOGY

Grand Jury members of the Health, Education, and Welfare committee interviewed school administrators and transportation staff at the ASJUSD, SBHSD, and LTA. Their interviews focused on procedures and timetables related to the refueling of CNG buses. Grand Jury members also inspected the CNG refueling station at San Benito High School (SBHS), including that station’s CNG refueling nozzles. Refueling logs were reviewed along with the maintenance cost as it applied to the CNG buses.

DISCUSSION

In San Benito County, the ASJUSD, SBHSD, and LTA all operate CNG buses. However, only the SBHSD and the LTA have CNG refueling stations. To refuel its buses, the ASJUSD must travel to SBHS or to the LTA, both located in Hollister, or to a CNG refueling station owned by PG&E in Salinas.

The SBHSD Transportation Department, located on the southwest side of the SBHS campus, is responsible for the refueling of the high school’s CNG buses. Several years ago, the SBHSD received a \$400,000 grant from the Monterey Bay United Air Pollution Control Board for the construction of its CNG refueling station. As part of the grant’s

requirements, the SBHSD must make the refueling facility available to any local public agency requesting its use. Each agency is responsible for its own fuel cost.

When the Grand Jury began its original inquiry into the CNG refueling of the school buses owned by the ASJUSD, it discovered that the ASJUSD was refueling in Salinas. After investigating the situation, the Grand Jury determined that the primary issue the ASJUSD had for not going to SBHS was the amount of time it took for refueling at the SBHS refueling station.

According to the 2006-07 Grand Jury report, the ASJUSD had been sending its CNG buses to Salinas since December 2006 because the fast-fill nozzle at the CNG refueling station at SBHS was in need of repair. In the discovery phase of this investigation, the Grand Jury noted that two types of CNG nozzles could be used for refueling. A normal-fill nozzle takes approximately 90 minutes to fill up a school bus, while a fast-fill nozzle takes about 15 minutes.

The ASJUSD administrators were concerned about the “wait-time” with respect to the use of the normal-fill nozzle at the CNG refueling station at SBHS. During the interview process, the Grand Jury noted that, in terms of “wasted manpower” hours, the ASJUSD felt it would be in its best interest to send its CNG buses to a refueling station in Salinas that utilized a fast-fill nozzle.

Upon further investigation by Grand Jury members, the problem with the fast-fill nozzle at the CNG refueling station at SBHS was identified. The fast-fill nozzle had been sent for repair, but the Transportation Department staff was unaware of its status. (It should be noted that the Transportation Department had been experiencing a number of changes in its management in recent years.)

During the Grand Jury’s investigation, SBHS administration researched the whereabouts of the invoice on the fast-fill nozzle. The repaired nozzle was finally located in the school’s bus barn.

In November 2007, SBHSD Transportation Department staff installed the fast-filling CNG nozzle. Since then, the ASJUSD has been sending its CNG school buses to SBHS for refueling.

FINDINGS

F1. ASJUSD had not been refueling its buses at SBHS because of an inadequate CNG nozzle.

F2. ASJUSD is currently refueling its buses at SBHS.

RECOMMENDATIONS

No recommendations.

RESPONSE REQUIRED

No response required.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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