



PREMIUM PODCASTS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

LATE NIGHT HEALTH

The Importance of Student Health and the Environment



This is a special edition of Late Night Health. I'm Mark Alyn. With the school new year about to begin, I think we all want our kids to have a safe, clean, healthy ride to school. Joining us again is Tucker Perkins, President and CEO of PERC, the Propane Education Research Council. And Tucker is here to discuss government plans to modernize the nation's school bus fleet and cleaner air options like electric and propane. Tucker, nice to talk to you again. Mark, great to be with you and kind of look forward to this conversation. What do we know about our school buses in general? Uh, you know, I remember writing to school, some, well, going on, on field trips. I, I rode my bike to school most of the time, but going on field trips, uh, to, uh, to places on stinky old buses, were they clean and safe? No. And I think sadly, most children still ride those same type buses today. You know, you think about it, you remember that cloud of black smoke. I wonder if you remember the noise inside. We now know a lot about the impact of both of those, but let's start with that cloud of black smoke. That black smoke is not only outside the bus, it's inside the bus. Inside that cloud are all kinds of harmful pollutants and irritants to lungs, bad for the climate, create diseases like bronchitis and asthma in children, COPD in adults. And so if we can move away from diesel to a cleaner fuel like propane powered school buses, that cloud of black smoke is gone. We've also learned over the last years the importance of being quieter. Those buses are much quieter. Children arrive to school calmer. They seem to be ready to learn earlier in the day. So they're calmer. They attend school more often because they're not home sick. It's a much better learning experience just by changing the fuel that takes them to school.

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And I understand that the buses themselves can be, what, up to 50% less than say an electric bus?

Yeah.

Rare.

Well, no, 50% cheaper to operate than a diesel bus.

I think people don't even realize how complex the diesel bus has come just to meet emission standards.

So fleets across the country operating a propane bus, it's half the operating cost.

In fact, if we converted all the diesel buses to propane buses, the savings could put 23,000 teachers into the classroom.

It's an amazing story.

Uh, and to let's go ahead to your comparison to electric, a propane bus compared to a electric bus, a propane bus cost one third, the initial cost, even a little bit less than a third.

If you include the infrastructure it takes to charge both, uh, a propane bus or an electric bus.

And so the real choice is not whether you chose propane or electric.

The real choice is how fast you get rid of those older diesel buses.

And by choosing propane, you do it at three times the rate.

With what we do with propane now, other than fill our, our, our, our barbecue tanks.

So, so Mark, I'm always glad when people start with that, um, 50 million people have a barbecue tank, as you say, that's powered by propane.

But we are so much more.

And I think the conversation I get into every day is how can the fuel that's in my barbecue grill change the climate and change the health of America?

And the answer is everywhere.

So just coming back from a port, one of the busiest ports in America, and you actually have one of the busiest ports in America as well, moving from diesel fuel there, to propane, and all of the equipment, the port tractors, the container movers, power generation.

And now we're talking about transportation.

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We're talking about transporting children, but we could be talking about transporting goods and services as we move from diesel to a cleaner fuel called propane.

I firmly believe the future of transportation will come down quickly to electric vehicles, which have a lot of places they work well, and then propane vehicles, which also have a lot of places they work really well.

Are there different places that the electric versus propane work?

Oh, certainly.

I think some school systems have available electricity.

Their routes are short.

Their temperatures are not extreme.

It's a great place to consider electricity.

Many other places don't have that luxury.

They have long routes,

perhaps big mountain grades, perhaps super cold in the winter, and maybe super hot in the summer where batteries just aren't efficient enough yet. Uh, they might not have available infrastructure to charge things.

And so, uh, I think, you know,

school systems thinking about a modern way to get children to school have to consider both propane and electric, but in many, many cases,

whether it's cost or operating cycle or even availability, propane is the choice that they make.

We, we talk about the environment and you, you mentioned the big black smoke.

And obviously that's, uh, the diesel here in the LA area add to, uh, what we call smog, um, does propane, uh, uh, provide a, a lesser impact on the environment?

Yeah, I think one of, one of the things that probably frustrates me

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coast as I travel, I go to LA, I see that smog, we could make that smog go away almost overnight by eradicating diesel and using cleaner fuels like propane or in some cases even natural gas.

But let's stick with propane for a second.

That smog is generally provided from NOx emissions, which if we use propane compared to diesel, we'll cut those NOx emissions 97%.

percent. I talked as well about a few off-road uses, forklifts, port tractors, power generators, and a whole host of things. We could have that smog go away nearly overnight

if we would eliminate using diesel and give preferential treatment to using a domestic fuel like propane. I remember my father having a diesel car and every time I drove it, It felt like driving a Mack truck.

It was so, it was a rough ride and a rough motor.

I don't know why.

I love talking to drivers who have moved from diesel to propane and they routinely tell us a couple of things.

They love the power.

They love the quietness.

They love the lack of odor,

meaning they've just gotten rid of that old diesel smell.

It's not much you can do about the smell of diesel.

It's just there.

And so it's a great advantage for drivers.

It's a great advantage for the climate and it's a great advantage for our health.

And I'm not sure which one of those is the top priority,

but I'm pretty sure that all three together really make a compelling case to choose propane.

And it also goes back to helping the kids on the school buses.

Tell us briefly about the government program to invest in cleaner school buses.

The EPA sees value in transitioning from diesel to propane.

They created a clean school bus program that refunds a portion of the purchase price of a propane bus back to the fleet.

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And so you get not only a lower initial cost, but you get the benefits of that lower operating cost.

And it really gives the school system, you know, a financial leg up by choosing propane.

Well, as we wrap up this time together, and we still have a couple of, I'm hoping for some summer months here in Southern California, but with climate change, one can never tell.

We have a heat wave going that's pretty devastating right now.

even where I live, which is not far from the beach, it's hot and I like to be outside and grilling with my propane barbecue.

Where can we go for more information on this and learn more about the propane education and research?

Yeah, I want to, I want to give you two websites because you and I have talked about a broad range of applications beyond school buses.

If you, as you think about how propane fits into the national conversation around a cleaner climate, perhaps a national conversation around energy security and also environmental equity.

Uh, I would recommend everyone go to propane.com.

It's a great place.

There's an environmental tab there and they can learn a lot about what I'm talking about in the port of LA.

about transportation, or even about how to use their grills safely.

As we go down into school buses, and I think that's a real important topic as we think about going back to school,

we created a special website called betterourbuses.com.

Parents can go and engage there in the facts specific around school transportation and interact with their school authorities to really, I would say, demand

that their children have a safer, cleaner, healthier ride to school by choosing a propane bus.

Tucker, thank you very much. We've been talking to Tucker Perkins, president and CEO of PERC, the Propane Education and Research Council. And if you want more information, go to betterourbuses.com. I'm Mark Alyn and this is Late Night Health.

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