

Sun Valley Division Says 'No Tanks' To Leaky Fuel Cylinders

By ERIC RAPP

(Sept. 4, 2002) Sun Valley Division 15 Maintenance had a big problem that was taking CNG buses out of service. But by working hard, the mechanics at this division were able to accomplish what seemed to be impossible in only a few short months.



PHOTO BY ERIC RAPP

Mechanic Leader Julio Vargas with some recently removed CNG fuel cylinders.

The problem began with compressed natural gas fuel cylinders on 1995 model year Neoplan buses. The fuel tanks, manufactured by a company named EDO, have a tendency to develop leaks. Unfortunately, EDO went out of business shortly after the new buses were delivered to MTA.

Because each Neoplan bus has 12 fuel tanks, mechanics could keep the bus in service by simply closing the damaged fuel tank and allowing the bus to run on 11 tanks.

However, as more tanks began to fail, more and more buses had to be put on a twice-a-day fueling schedule or were marked "hold," meaning they could not be used at all. For regular daily service, the division was forced to use older diesel buses.

Mechanics solving the problem

In late 2001, the mechanics at the division took on the job of replacing all the defective tanks in the Neoplan buses. Mechanic Leader Julio Vargas noted that this was no easy task considering that replacing all the tanks on a single bus takes almost a week with the labor available.

"It was hard at the beginning," says Vargas, "because we still had all our regular work to do."

More tanks continued to fail, causing more buses to become problems. Despite these setbacks, within a month all six "held" buses were back in service. Vargas and his crew didn't stop there.

"Once we were done with those we started concentrating on the 'tripper' buses," he says.

Now, nearly six months later, Division 15 mechanics have replaced over 350 defective tanks with newer, more reliable fuel cylinders. At this pace, management expects that every single EDO fuel tank on Division 15's fleet of 96 Neoplan buses will be replaced by March 2003.

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