Volvo Trucks and Safeway to Test Bio-DME-Powered Vehicles in North America

by Brandon Borgna

Volvo Trucks in North America will partner with Safeway Inc., one of the largest food and drug retailers in North America, and Oberon Fuels to test heavy-duty commercial vehicles powered by dimethyl ether (DME) produced from biomass. The project received $500,000 in funding from California’s San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (SJVAPCD) and will be the second customer field test conducted by Volvo Trucks in the U.S.

“We look forward to further validating DME technology for the trucking industry with Safeway and Oberon,” said Göran Nyberg, president of Volvo Trucks North American Sales & Marketing. “We believe the fuel shows great potential for the North American market, and when produced from biomass, it can provide a 95 percent reduction in CO2 compared to diesel.”

Volvo plans to commercialize DME technology in North America in 2015. Two DME-powered Volvo VNL models equipped with a Volvo D13 engine will run in the San Joaquin Valley region of California in Safeway’s commercial operations using Oberon-produced DME. Oberon is the first company to announce plans to commercialize DME fuel production in North America, and has developed skid-mounted, small-scale production units that cost-effectively convert biogas and natural gas to DME.

One of the most significant benefits of DME is that it can be made from a variety of sustainable biomass feedstocks like food, animal and agricultural waste, as well as from natural gas.

“The Oberon process enables previously wasted resources to be converted to clean-burning DME,” said Neil Senturia, CEO of Oberon Fuels.

“DME is an exciting fuel because it has the potential to improve air quality, which is a major challenge in the San Joaquin Valley region,” said Seyed Sadedin, executive director of the SJVAPCD. “New technologies, like DME-powered commercial vehicles, are greatly needed, which is why we chose to provide funds for this project.”

Volvo has already been successfully testing trucks in the U.S. powered by DME, and is the first OEM to announce plans to offer DME-powered vehicles in the North American market.

Safeway decided to participate in the field tests because of the company’s positive experience with Volvo trucks, as well as the company’s focus on sustainability.

“Safeway is very interested in alternative fuels, and we currently run Volvo trucks in our fleet,” said Tom Naratke, vice president of transportation at Safeway. “We decided to test Volvo DME technology in our fleet because it is a natural fit with our sustainability strategy.”

The addition of DME-powered vehicles expands Volvo’s alternative fuel product range, which already includes compressed natural gas (CNG)-powered Volvo VNM and VNL model daycabs. Volvo also will introduce its proprietary D13-LNG (liquefied natural gas) engine – North America’s first fully integrated natural gas solution – in VNL model daycabs and sleepers next year.

Volvo Trucks North America’s operations and products are guided by the company’s three core values: Quality, Safety and Environmental Care. The Volvo VN, VHD and VAH trucks are assembled in the United States at the New River Valley Plant in Dublin, Virginia, while Volvo engines for North America are assembled in Hagerstown, Maryland. Both plants are certified to ISO14001 environmental and ISO9001 quality standards.

The Volvo Group is one of the world’s leading manufacturers of trucks, buses, construction equipment and marine and industrial engines. The Group also provides complete solutions for financing and service. The Volvo Group, which employs about 115,000 people, has production facilities in 19 countries and sells its products in more than 190 markets. In 2012, the Volvo Group’s sales amounted to $45 billion. The Volvo Group is a publicly-held company headquartered in Gothenburg, Sweden. Volvo shares are listed on OXM Nordic Exchange Stockholm and are traded OTC in the U.S. For more information, please visit http://www.volvolgroup.com/ or http://www.volvolgroup.mobi if you are using your mobile phone.

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