



SUMMER 2005

MEI AND PARTNERS ANNOUNCE MAJOR DIESEL RETROFIT INITIATIVE

After two years of successful pilot projects, Clean Air Minnesota is about to take a big step toward achieving larger-scale emission reductions. A handful of CAM partners have begun planning an effort to retrofit at least 500 school buses over the coming two years with pollution-reducing equipment. The outcomes of this project will benefit regional air quality at large, as well as the health of children riding the retrofitted buses.



This bold step forward has been encouraged over the past six months by leadership and staff at the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Now, I am happy to announce that Flint Hills Resources has made a leadership contribution to begin building the pool of private funds it will take to make the project real. In the coming months, we will be seeking many more partners, including funders at a wide range of levels. We anticipate that implementation of the project will begin in 2006.

Clean Air Minnesota has been interested in diesel retrofits since the inception of the program. Diesel engines are known to be a major source of the emissions that are the precursors to ground-level ozone as well as fine particles. These emissions are concerns both for health reasons and because of the economic consequences that face Minnesota as the risk of violating federal air quality standards grows.

In examining air quality efforts around the country, diesel retrofits are typically one of the most cost-effective means of achieving significant air pollution reductions. In particular, there has been growing interest in retrofitting school buses, not only to improve ambient air quality, but also to reduce direct exposure of children on buses. In the past year, Clean Air Minnesota has been engaged in a diesel retrofit pilot through which we explored a variety of opportunities to install pollution control equipment on both on-road and off-

road vehicles. Just a few months ago, we installed diesel oxidation catalysts on three maintenance trucks in Ramsey County. For each truck, the retrofit will bring about at least a 30 percent reduction in air pollutants. We are in the midst of completing an additional 15 retrofits on the diesel vehicles of four more Clean Air Minnesota partner organizations. With these successful pilot installations under our belts, now is a good time to set our sights on wider implementation and larger reductions.

As a result, this project comes at an important turning point for Clean Air Minnesota. In the two years since the program was founded, our partners have reduced 2.2 tons per day of air emissions through totally voluntary action. This is an impressive start to be sure, but it represents just the first steps toward the 15 tons per day of reductions in volatile organic compounds that is our goal to achieve by 2010. These early successes have shown that both public and private sector entities will make voluntary reductions, even in times of limited resources. Our most important challenge now is to scale up to achieve larger reductions. With the leadership of MPCA, EPA and Flint Hills Resources, we now have a major opportunity to do just that. Please contact either Bill Droessler, Clean Air Minnesota director, or me if you would like to help.

-- Mike Harley, executive director
mharley@mn-ei.org

MEI TAKES A NEW APPROACH TO ENERGY

MEI is listening. Since the start of 2005, MEI has conducted a series of listening sessions to survey the landscape of energy issues and gain a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities that face Minnesota around energy. What we heard is shaping a new approach to energy at MEI.

Between February and June, we engaged a cross-section of partners with simple, broad questions that encompassed electricity, natural gas and transportation fuels. These partners included business and low-income consumers, state and local

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-- PETER FROSCH, ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY DIRECTOR

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government entities, utilities, environmental advocates, and efficiency and conservation experts. Despite the diversity of perspectives, compelling themes emerged.

Among these themes was unease over the cost of energy and a growing tension between the need to control rising prices and making major investments to ensure reliable power supplies. A trend toward regionalization of Minnesota's electric system and uncertainty over its effects received frequent mention. While partners often identified similar issues, such as electric generation needs, gasoline prices or climate change, they varied widely in their interpretation of appropriate solutions or even the issues' basic facts.

And it's no surprise that everyone saw the politics around energy issues as particularly delicate. Enormous capital investments, technical and regulatory complexity, and real or perceived competition among deeply held values such as cost, reliability and environmental sensitivity are just a few of the complicating characteristics of energy policy. But nearly all interviewees felt these barriers might be overcome in the near term due to mounting pressure for change. For example, we heard that rising demand for electricity could force decisions about building significant new electric generation and transmission capacity. If major change in our energy system is afoot, what direction is the state headed? What kind of energy future does Minnesota want? And who will decide?

The listening sessions produced valuable insights and raised a host of demanding questions. In a moment pregnant with both uncertainty and opportunity, MEI is hopeful that leaders and citizens can create an energy system where reliability, affordability and environmental sustainability find balance. Doing so will require a thoughtful and collaborative approach involving a wide range of voices over a number of years. In a challenge of this scale, first steps matter.

Early this summer, MEI's Environmental Policy program is taking steps toward a new kind of energy conversation focused on outcomes and shared interest. In mid-June, MEI will hold a policy forum titled *Minnesota's Energy Future*, which will engage energy decision-makers and opinion lead-

ers from the business, government and nonprofit communities in an informed dialogue about the broad spectrum of energy challenges facing Minnesota. Then in late June, MEI will hold a public release for *Minnesota Research Priorities*, a clean energy research report produced through a partnership among a diverse collection of energy technology experts. Both events will be opportunities to develop a better, shared understanding of Minnesota's changing energy landscape and to focus attention and resources on tangible action steps.

These events are the first evidence of MEI's new approach to energy issues, which will integrate each of the organization's programs and involve dozens of new and long-standing community partners. You can expect to read more about our new energy work in newsletters to come.

-- Peter Frosch, Environmental Policy director
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CAM PARTNERS COMPLETE FIRST LANDSCAPING DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

When congregation members of St. Louis Park's Lutheran Church of the Reformation look out the church windows these days, they see fledgling prairie grasses, wildflowers and oak saplings where there once was only grass. That's a change for the better in terms of air quality, says Mark Ten Eyck, co-chair of MEI's Clean Air Minnesota program and advocacy director for the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy (MCEA).

The church is home to Clean Air Minnesota's first clean air landscaping demonstration project, dedicated on April 28 in celebration of Arbor Day. Clean air landscaping involves using innovative landscape design and maintenance to minimize air pollution. Lawn mowing, trimming and blowing are big contributors to air pollution in the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

With Clean Air Minnesota partner MCEA as lead, a small project team has been working on the landscaping transition for the past two years. The team provided technical assis-

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-- MICHAEL WELCH, R4R DIRECTOR

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tance to congregation members, who voted to return the church’s 1.1 acres of traditional mowed-grass campus back to its native oak savannah landscape. The switch will reduce smog-forming air emissions by more than 100 pounds per year by eliminating the need for gasoline-powered maintenance equipment.

“It’s important to Clean Air Minnesota to show that attractive landscaping doesn’t require the constant use of mowers and blowers that contribute to the metro area’s air pollution levels,” Ten Eyck remarked.

In addition to reducing air pollution, the landscaping project will yield a number of other benefits for the community. It will improve the water quality of a local lake by filtering runoff from streets and parking surfaces through rain gardens. It has increased urban habitat for songbirds, butterflies and other wildlife. And it will also provide environmental educational opportunities for local school and community groups.

The Lutheran Church of the Reformation is part of a growing trend of religious communities making the connection between faith and environmental protection. The church has joined other congregations in a group called Congregations Caring for Creation, which portrays active care of the environment as integral to spiritual life and social justice in Minnesota communities of faith.

In addition to MCEA, Clean Air Minnesota partners and funders for this important project included the Metropolitan Council, Applied Ecological Services and Flint Hills Resources.

-- Colleen Coyne, CAM outreach manager
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CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2005 ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVE AWARDS WINNERS

The winners of the 2005 Environmental Initiative Awards were announced on Thursday, May 5, at the McNamara Alumni Center of the University of Minnesota. The Environmental Initiative Awards are presented annually to

projects that exemplify MEI’s commitment to partnership and environmental outcomes. Congratulations to all of this year’s winners and finalists!

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Minnesota: A History of the Land

ENERGY

St. Paul Cogeneration

PRIVATE SECTOR INNOVATION

MCEA - FHR Partnership: Emission Reductions and Reporting

PUBLIC SECTOR INNOVATION

Burnsville Rainwater-Garden Retrofit Project

LAND USE AND PARTNERSHIP OF THE YEAR

The Phalen Corridor

Detailed descriptions of the projects can be found at:
www.mn-ei.org/awards/finalistswinners.html

R4R DIRECTOR MICHAEL WELCH BIDS FAREWELL, REFLECTS ON HIS TIME AT MEI

During my tenure at MEI I have run the Resources for Redevelopment program, coordinated the organization’s communications work, cobbled together a computer network, attended countless forums, meetings, dialogues and working sessions, and learned more than I could have imagined when I signed on in 1998. Driving home from an MEI event more than five years ago, I decided that having a law degree would enable me to more broadly and effectively work to improve Minnesota’s environment. Now with a law degree in hand, I am leaving MEI at the end of June. The transition prompts a few observations on the somewhat astonishing growth and maturation of the organization.

I am very proud of the ambition and sophistication MEI has developed in the seven years I've been here. The fundamental premise of the work remains salient and compelling: that by bringing together individuals representing organizations with vested interests in -- but different perspectives on -- particular environmental issues, significant improvements can be realized. But in the late 1990s several different applications of that operating structure were competing for preeminence: should MEI provide business expertise to specific classes of professionals to help them improve the environmental performance of their companies? Was MEI purely an information provider, with forums designed principally to produce broader awareness of certain issues? Should MEI use its "neutral" position to mediate disputes?

In a remarkable display of harmony amidst the strategic cacophony of the time, MEI staff and board cut through the din, agreeing in late 1998 that six simple words should

describe the organization's work: "innovative partnerships to improve our environment." That mission has been supplanted by a more elegant statement now, but underlying that accord was an understanding that MEI was actively trying to improve the state's environment, and the partnership model was our vehicle for accomplishing that. In that crystallization was born the organization's enduring focus on achieving real, substantial outcomes.

Staff's accession to the new mission was the first step toward greater organizational unity. Staff increasingly began to seek each other's insight and advice. All staff now work together to identify emerging issues and create appropriate, effective venues for addressing them. When it comes to collaboration, MEI now exemplifies its espoused ideals. Staff have become leaders in the environmental community, showing up with plans for action rather than blank pieces of paper.

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I've enclosed my membership contribution to support MEI.

_____ \$550 Corporation

_____ \$95 Individual Sustainer

_____ \$295 Small business/government/nonprofit

_____ \$35 Individual Member

_____ \$ Other

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They give talented, intelligent, creative, bold people a place to try things that they cannot do on their own. Now MEI is a place where people can not only hear others' perspectives and opinions, they can build viable strategies for acting on them – because MEI staff are willing to lead the way.

Much about MEI cannot be transfused into other places. But I will take a great deal of what I've learned – and the passion that drives the people who work at and with MEI – to everything I do in the future. It's been a joy.

-- Michael Welch, R4R director
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JOB OPENINGS

Check www.mn-ei.org/basics/staff.html for current job openings at MEI.

THANKS, MEMBERS

MEI's work is supported by the generous contributions of its members. Thank you to the individuals and organizations listed below for their recent membership contributions.

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Members can also contribute to MEI through the Minnesota Environmental Fund, a workplace giving organization that supports 20 Minnesota environmental nonprofit organizations.

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RESOURCES FOR REDEVELOPMENT LAUNCHES SUSTAINABLE REDEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

Throughout the past year, MEI's Resources for Redevelopment program has been realigning its focus. With the help of a newly-created advisory group, the program aims to make sustainable redevelopment of underutilized properties a widely used strategy to achieve environmental progress, as well as economic and social growth in Minnesota.

To get involved or for more information, please contact Megan Dobratz, mdobratz@mn-ei.org