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ZEV stops traffic on campus

Summary: A ZEV is stopping traffic these days on the campus of the University of Minnesota, Morris. For one thing, it has a distinctive look. Secondly, it travels at a slower than usual speed.

(April 7, 2008)-ZEV is stopping traffic these days on the campus of the University of Minnesota, Morris. For one thing, it has a distinctive look. Secondly, it travels at a slower than usual speed.

ZEV is an electric Zero Emission Vehicle, a replacement addition to the campus' plant services work fleet. It will be used for light hauling—the box can convert to a flatbed— securing parts and traveling to service areas on the campus. UMM purchased the first such vehicle sold in the state of Minnesota.

“We sold one of our gas-powered vehicles to the campus' Heating Plant,” explained Dale Logan, senior automotive mechanic at UMM, “and purchased this one with the money.” The cost to purchase the DC drive, 48-volt, 18 and one-half horsepower ZEV was \$12,500.

It's a fuel-efficient vehicle, running on electricity instead of gas. In an electricity vs. gas comparison, the ZEV uses .0295 cents per mile vs. .3281 cents per mile for a gas vehicle. Annual cost for electricity is \$161 for the ZEV vs. \$1,796 for its gas counterpart. The ZEV's classification as a “neighborhood electrical vehicle” means that it can be licensed and anyone with a valid driver's license can drive it. Maximum speed it can travel—even pushing “pedal to the metal”—is 24 mph, which complies nicely with the 15 and 20 mph posted speed limits on campus roads. It can be driven only on roads that are posted 35 mph and under.

“The ZEV is another example of UMM's dedication to protect the environment,” said Lowell Rasmussen, vice chancellor for finance and facilities. “We're evaluating the vehicle and I wouldn't be surprised if the campus purchased additional similar vehicles in the future.”

Operation and maintenance of the ZEV are as simple as its design: turn on the key, disengage the brake, place it in reverse or forward gear. With no oil to change, for example, the ZEV requires 90 percent less maintenance, said Logan. In addition, with no gas used, there are no exhaust fumes. And the vehicle offers a quiet ride.

ZEV can be driven about 50 miles in the summer until it needs to be recharged, during which Plant Services staff plug in the vehicle overnight. Winter driving mileage is still being determined, although Logan estimated about 20 miles of winter travel in the rear wheel drive vehicle before recharging is necessary. Although UMM's ZEV features no speedometer, it does have a battery indicator. And while Logan says ZEVs come only in white, he expects that, perhaps for an additional cost, one can order other custom colors.

In many ways, said Logan, “its operation is similar to an EZ Go golf cart.”

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