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Oak Harbor schools win top Partners for Clean Air honor District earns NWCAA's Platinum award

OAK HARBOR – A growing number of propane-fueled buses. New high-efficiency, emissions-reducing boilers in schools. New lighting that saves energy and public money.

Those are just a few examples of steps [Oak Harbor Public Schools](#) has taken to improve air quality and earn this year's Platinum award through the [Northwest Clean Air Agency's](#) Partners for Clean Air program. The Platinum award is the agency's top honor for work to improve air quality.

"Oak Harbor schools are reducing air emissions, protecting the health of kids and the community, and saving public money. The amount of work they have done, and continue doing, is commendable," said Mark Buford, Northwest Clean Air Agency executive director. "It's a great pleasure to recognize their environmental stewardship with our Platinum award."

Brian Hunt, the 5,800-student district's facilities and maintenance director, said: "It seems like in the last five or six years, technology has advanced so much. So we've taken advantage of that."

The result is increased efficiency, reduced air emissions and money savings, Hunt said.

That isn't a new philosophy, noted John Cooper, a facilities and maintenance staff member who joined the district in 1996. "We've always been on a proactive energy conservation path since I've been here."

In its award application, the district noted its "awareness, dedication, and perseverance not only to maintain and improve our current environment but to instill in the students of our district and the community the importance and attention that is required to maintain a healthy community for our generation and for future generations to come."

Oak Harbor Public Schools currently has 11 propane-fueled buses in its 56-bus fleet, with plans to bring in more. Transportation director Francis Bagarella said switching to those propane-fueled buses has saved over \$35,000, partly because of federal rebates and the bus vendor's offer to pay for fuel for a year for each new bus.

Using propane instead of diesel has also reduced smog-producing bus exhaust. That protects public health from the [toxic tiny particles](#) in diesel exhaust.

The Oak Harbor district's [annual energy report](#) details the actions it takes to increase efficiency and reduce emissions, which benefit air quality. Examples include:

- Cutting energy use by replacing outside lights with LED lighting at almost every use. Energy savings are estimated at 75 percent.
- Recycling, using green cleaning products and cultivating garden zones at schools help students take an active role in reducing environmental impacts and conserving resources. Such activities at Hillcrest Elementary School earned a "Green Ribbon Award" from the U.S. Department of Education – one of just 58 schools nationwide.
- Installing high-efficiency boilers at North Whidbey Middle School and Hillcrest Elementary, and upgrading pipes at Oak Harbor Middle School. That work resulted in cutting natural gas use in half.

Partners for Clean Air awards

Northwest Clean Air started presenting its Partners for Clean Air awards annually to businesses in Island, Skagit, and Whatcom counties in 2010. Three levels are awarded: Platinum, Gold, and Silver. This year, a total of 35 sources registered with NWCAA received awards.

The agency selects the Platinum winner as the stand-out business among the Gold award winners. Oak Harbor School District officials received a plaque and recognition at a Northwest Clean Air board of directors meeting on March 9.

To win Gold, businesses must comply with all applicable air quality regulations for at least three years and employ additional clean air practices in at least two of these categories: energy efficiency; emissions reductions; air pollution prevention practices related to their specific business sector; and transportation, such as reducing commute trips, having no-idling policies and switching to cleaner vehicle fleets.

Details about the Gold winners' clean air efforts are available on the Northwest Clean Air [business recognition web page](#).

The 2017 Gold winners are:

- [Chemtrade Sulex Inc.](#), Mount Vernon
- [Healthy Pet](#), Ferndale
- [Hexcel Corp.](#), Burlington
- [LKQ Corp.](#), Bellingham
- [Nature's Path Foods](#), Blaine
- [North Hill Resources](#), Burlington
- [Skagit Grand Central Collision & Automotive Repair](#), Burlington
- [Trident Seafoods](#), Anacortes
- [Wood Stone](#), Bellingham

A list of Silver award winners is available on the NWCAA [business recognition web page](#).

The Northwest Clean Air Agency is responsible for enforcing federal, state and local air quality regulations in Island, Skagit, and Whatcom counties. In addition to permitting and regulating industrial sources of air pollution, the agency provides services and information related to asbestos, indoor air quality, outdoor burning, woodstoves and fireplaces. More information about the agency is available at www.nwcleanairwa.gov.