DEUSA Fleet Success Stories:
YES! Compost
Belgrade, MT

Location: Belgrade, MT
Fleet type: Medium-duty diesel and electric vehicles

Narrative: YES! Compost has been interested in alternative and sustainable fuels for its fleet for many years. Over the past decade, owner Karl Johnson has experimented with straight vegetable oil, biodiesel, and more recently renewable diesel in his collection trucks. In recent years, with the high cost and limited availability of suitable electric medium-duty vehicles, Karl has been actively tracking emerging options. In 2024 and 2025, he worked with Bollinger and Kenworth to spec a collection truck and explore funding opportunities through the EPA Clean Vehicle Program, which would cover a portion of the vehicle cost. However, even with incentives, quotes exceeding $200,000 left the remaining out-of-pocket cost unfeasible for this small business.

A key barrier has been the combination of required route range, winter operating conditions, and payload capacity needed for waste and compost collection in the region.

To support feasibility planning, Yellowstone-Teton Clean Cities collaborated with YES! Compost, joining calls and coordinating communications with Montana DEQ, Kenworth, Bollinger, and more recently Harbinger, to evaluate viable medium-duty EV options for Montana operating conditions.

As part of Drive Electric Montana's work, Harbinger brought a medium-duty electric vehicle to Missoula, MT for a ride-and-drive event. Although Karl was unable to attend, a follow-up visit to Bozeman by Harbinger helped further the discussion and refine the technical and operational requirements for YES! Compost's fleet needs.

During this period, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality opened funding through remaining Volkswagen settlement funds to support replacement of older diesel vehicles. YES! Compost applied for and was awarded over $215,000, covering 75% of a Harbinger S656 upfitted with dump body and associated charging equipment to support collection routes.

The goal remains to reduce operating costs for YES! Compost while also lowering fleet emissions and improving long-term sustainability.

Karl is also anticipating operational benefits from the EV configuration, including the ability to charge overnight at the shop so vehicles begin each day fully charged and ready for service, potentially reducing downtime and improving route efficiency.

Additional anticipated benefits include:

- Reduced fuel and maintenance costs compared to aging diesel vehicles
- Lower noise and improved community experience during collections
- Improved reliability and reduced downtime from mechanical issues
- Demonstration of medium-duty EV feasibility in cold-weather, rural operating conditions

YES! Compost is excited to continue advancing sustainable fleet solutions while maintaining dependable service for its customers across the region.

While there are still a few outstanding details regarding match funding and upfront vehicle costs prior to reimbursement through the DEQ program, the project is currently moving forward positively. As of May 2026, Karl expects the vehicle to be upfitted and delivered by Jan or Feb of 2027.

Outputs & Outcomes

Outputs

- Replacement of one older diesel collection vehicle (2005 16’ Isuzu Box Truck)
- Deployment of one medium-duty electric collection vehicle
- Integration of cleaner fuel/energy source aligned with organizational sustainability goals

Outcomes

- Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and diesel consumption
- Removal of a high-maintenance, low-efficiency vehicle from service
- Demonstration of medium-duty EV viability in cold-weather, rural Montana conditions
- Increased awareness among regional fleets that medium-duty EV adoption is feasible for small businesses

Best Practices & Lessons Learned: Long-term monitoring of medium-duty EV development allowed Karl and YES! Compost to act quickly when a viable platform became available. Familiarity with pricing trends, vehicle limitations, and funding mechanisms helped the organization evaluate options realistically and avoid investing in unsuitable early-stage technologies.

Key lessons include:

- Early engagement with manufacturers improves specification accuracy and feasibility
- Coordinating with state agencies and Clean Cities coalitions strengthens access to funding and technical support
- Real-world route constraints (winter range, payload, charging time) must drive vehicle selection more than specifications alone
- Small fleets benefit from flexible, staged adoption strategies rather than full fleet conversion

Read more about the story behind YES! Compost here: https://www.yescompost.com/story.