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Finding Ways to Reduce Idling Can Be Challenging for Carriers

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For carriers, the effort to find the best nonidling cooling option for the truck cab has not been without starts and stops.

In Joplin, Mo., Con-way Truckload tested 250 diesel auxiliary power units to cool the cabs in its 2,800 sleeper trucks, said maintenance director Randy Cornell.

Three years later, the truckload carrier is abandoning the devices — which, like all diesel models, run on their own small diesel tank.

"We were not getting that improved fuel-mileage spread between an APU truck and a non-APU truck that we needed to show

a return on investment," he said. "To justify an APU, you almost have to get ... about a gallon difference between an APU truck and a non-APU truck ... and we're seeing in the range of three-tenths."

Con-way Truckload is a subsidiary of Con-Way Inc., which ranks No. 3 on the TRANSPORT TOPICS Top 100 list of the largest for-hire carriers in the United States and Canada.

Con-Way is currently testing a battery-run cooling system with a shore-power option on two trucks. Cornell said there is no doubt the system cools the cab, but battery durability is at issue.

"We trade our trucks every four years, so we need something that's going to last four years," he said.

Royal Jones, president of

Mesilla Valley Transportation in Las Cruces, N.M., started putting diesel-fired APUs on his 920-unit fleet in 2007, trying two different brands.

"As great as they are, it still creates another oil change, another repair, another little parasite sucking fuel out of your tanks, just not as big a parasite," Jones said.

"Then I found drivers — OK, they can't leave the big motor running anymore, so now they leave the little one running," Jones said by way of explaining his switch to battery run, non-idling cooling systems.

He got 750 of his trucks outfitted with one brand when its maker went bankrupt, leaving Jones scrambling to find parts. Today, he is outfitting his fleet

with battery-run units that include a shore-power option and are made by IdleFree in Madison, Wis.

Typically, battery-powered, non-idling cooling systems, which charge off the truck battery when the vehicle is running, provide only 10 hours of cooling time.

But carriers said the time can be shorter if temperatures outside the cab are setting records and if drivers fail to sufficiently cool down the cab before they pull off the road to sleep.

Still, even when drivers aren't fully adept at using the systems, cooling the cab without idling can produce significant savings, said Stephen Normandin, director of strategic initiatives for Braun's Express, a Hopedale, Mass., car-

rier that bypassed diesel APUs and went straight to battery-run units.

Braun's has installed battery-powered units with shore-power options on the 40 sleepers in its 170-unit fleet.

"It's the biggest no-brainer of any fuel-saving equipment I've dealt with," Normandin said. "The payback on them at today's fuel prices is under a year."

In 2010, the carrier ran a test before installing the units on all its sleepers and found the fuel cost savings was \$8,487 per truck annually on the portion of the fleet equipped with the units, Normandin said.

Trucks with nonidling cooling units ran an average 6.75 miles per gallon of diesel, while those without averaged 5.87 mpg.



A Braun's Express truck is hooked up to an electric outlet at the carrier's facility. The carrier says the reduction in idling provides significant savings.



Stephen Normandin of Braun's Express says his fleet uses a battery-powered cooling unit that also allows for the use of shore power. "The payback on them ... is under a year," he says.

Photo courtesy of Braun's Express