

GM plant in Wentzville to build vans powered by alternative fuel

Production line answers demand, official says

By Joe Scott

Tuesday, May 25, 2010 3:11 AM CDT

General Motors' Wentzville assembly plant will begin producing compressed natural gas- and liquefied petroleum gas-powered cargo vans for 2011.

The alternative fuel options will be offered on Chevrolet Express and GMC Savana full-size vans for fleet and commercial customers later this year.

"It won't have an impact on hiring or additional jobs, but it will allow us to get penetration into an additional market," said Bob Wheeler, a spokesman for the plant. "The demand is increasing enough to add this product to our portfolio. We've had fleet and commercial users asking about this."

Production of CNG- and LPG-powered versions of the Chevrolet Express and GMC Savana full-size vans probably will begin in September, Wheeler said.

About 85 percent of the vehicles made at the Wentzville plant are sold for fleet or commercial use. Alternative fuels have become more attractive for fleet and commercial users as gasoline prices increase, Wheeler said.

Wentzville Community Development Director Bob Swank said even if the plant doesn't add jobs, a new product line should further stabilize the workforce.

"It's bringing back this product to the Wentzville area," Swank said. "The more environmentally conscious people get and the less we want to rely on oil, the more the LPG and CNG market grows."

Brian Small, general manager of GM's fleet and commercial operations, said in a news release that GM officials listened to fleet customers and dealers about offering options to help achieve business objectives.

"The industry commitment to expand the CNG and LPG infrastructure in key fleet markets was an enabler to allowing us to introduce these options now," Small said.

Swank said the city of Wentzville will offer a CNG fueling station on East Pearce Boulevard at Business Highway 61 near Pete's Drive-In for public use. The fueling

station was put on hold after GM discontinued production of CNG-powered vehicles at the Wentzville plant several years ago, he said.

"It will be one of three CNG fueling stations in Missouri," Swank said. "Fleet and commercial users can pull right off Highway 61 and refuel."

GM's announcement on the new Wentzville plant production line followed news the car manufacturer had a first-quarter profit of \$865 million and is expanding manufacturing in North America. Before its bankruptcy, GM lost \$6 billion in the first quarter of 2009.