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Fuel alternatives available on JBLM

Marisa Petrich/Northwest Guardian

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Joint Base Lewis-McChord is about to cut the ribbon on a new alternative fuel station — but this one has a twist.

“What is really unique about this is it’s the first one run by AAFES (Army and Air Force Exchange Service),” JBLM Sustainability Outreach Coordinator Miriam Villacian said.

Alternative fuel is hardly new to the military, but this station is providing three nonconventional fuels — E85 (85 percent Ethanol), B5 (5 percent biodiesel) and CNG (Compressed Natural Gas) — to any car with access to the installation.

The station, located at the Express on the corner of Pendleton Avenue and 2nd Division Drive, will have its official opening at a ribbon cutting at 2 p.m. Jan. 30, but it’s been fully operational since December. So far it’s been serving about 20 cars a day, with hopes for growth after the ceremony at the end of the month.

There is plenty of incentive to have such a station at JBLM. Currently 60 percent of U.S. General Services Administration vehicles are alternative fuel capable, and as such have a legal requirement to use them.

In fact, many other cars might be alt fuel capable, and the station has a system to help drivers figure out if theirs is one of them. A quick decision tree will guide most users when they pull up to the pump with clues based on their gas cap and other factors. But those who are still uncertain can look up any vehicle made after 1985 inside the station.

It’s possible that in the future visitors from off the installation can come use the pump, too — and by doing so help spread stations like the Express into the civilian world. Villacian hopes that the private sector will take advantage of the time and effort the military has put into developing alternative fuel stations to create their own.

“We’ve learned all the lessons that needed to be learned,” she said.

Now they just need to be applied.

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