

Clean Engines

Railroad engineers call them goats, but with over 2,000 horsepower, the switcher locomotives that move boxcars around rail yards are better thought of as Godzillas. And like the fire-spewing beast, they wreak havoc with their toxic breath -- in this case, diesel emissions.

In urban communities like Houston, diesel is a major cause of lung problems. It exacerbates asthma and, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, contributes to at least 70 percent of cancer risks caused by air pollution.

In a new bid to reduce diesel emissions in Houston, an enterprising company hopes to outfit the city's rail yards with its new Green Goat, an eco-friendly locomotive that runs off a hybrid gas-electric engine similar to those used by compact cars like the Toyota Prius and Honda Insight.

The RailPower Technologies Corp. of Vancouver, B.C., estimates air pollution savings from its Green Goat will equate to the removal 700 cars from the road.

The company has applied for Texas emissions reduction grants to help rail yards buy the \$850,000 Green Goat -- or a smaller model, the Green Kid -- and expects a decision from the state this month.

The Green Goat would cut fuel costs in half. "If these kind of savings became widespread among America's 10,000 switchers," says RailPower founder Nigel Horsley, "that would be a huge contribution." -
- J.H.