AT&T to put 8,000 natural-gas vehicles on road

March 11 2009, By PETER SVENSSON , AP Technology Writer

(AP) -- AT&T Inc. said Wednesday it will spend up to $350 million over five years to buy more than 8,000 Ford Motor Co. vans and trucks, then convert them to run on compressed natural gas.

It is the largest commitment by a U.S. corporation to vehicles using alternative fuels, the phone company said.

Natural gas is a fossil fuel, but burning it produces 25 percent less carbon emissions than using gasoline, AT&T said. Compared with oil, the U.S. produces a greater proportion of the natural gas it uses.

The company said it will spend the money over five years. While AT&T will buy the chassis from Ford, it has not yet selected a vendor to perform the conversion to natural gas, AT&T spokesman Fletcher Cook said.

The vehicles will be used by technicians who perform installations and maintain the telecommunications network, Cook said. The company will build 40 natural-gas filling stations to keep them rolling.

Compressed natural gas is already used by some cities and counties for their vehicle fleets, particularly for buses.

AT&T will also spend $215 million over 10 years to replace 7,100 passenger cars with hybrids, and eventually cars powered by other fuel sources, it said.

Dallas-based AT&T currently has 88,000 vehicles, Cook said.

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