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## **El Camino College to Offer Innovative Alternative Fuel Training Program for First Responders**

Firefighter Andrew Behrens knows that every call presents different challenges, so he is always interested in learning new skills and techniques to be prepared. When he heard about a new program at the El Camino Fire Academy that deals with responding to situations with alternative fuel vehicles, he enrolled right away.

“Technology is always changing and we want to make sure everything is safe for the firefighter, the patient, emergency personnel, and everyone involved,” said Behrens, an El Camino Fire Academy graduate who is a paid call firefighter in Manhattan Beach, a paramedic, and a mentor coordinator at the fire academy.

“For this training, I’m interested in looking at these kinds of cars to find out where everything is. There are a lot of things to consider. In an electric car, for example, battery connections have more voltage. In an alternative fuel vehicle, if there is a break in the tank we need to know how to handle it – especially dealing with natural gas, we need to learn how to contain and control it. There are a lot of things that come into play.”

Behrens will join the inaugural class of the El Camino Fire Academy’s new Alternative Fuel First Responder Training program. The program is among the first of its kind, offering emergency personnel training for situations involving vehicles that use alternative fuel, such as hybrids, electrical, compressed natural gas, and hydrogen. As these new technologies are introduced into everyday transportation, it has become critical for emergency responders to know the different safety techniques necessary to assist and save lives.

The first training course in this innovative program is scheduled from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. May 21 at the El Camino Fire Academy, 206 West Beach Street in Inglewood. Training includes classroom work as well as hands-on demonstrations with an alternative fuel vehicle.

ECC is serving as the lead college for the program, in partnership with 10 other colleges statewide. First Responder Training is one of the many courses El Camino College is providing to fire, police, sheriff departments, California Highway Patrol, mechanics who work with alternative fuel vehicles, as well as others who deal with emergencies involving alternative fuels.

Chief William Melendez, training coordinator of the El Camino Fire Academy, is assisting Eldon Davidson, director of contract training of the El Camino Business Training Center (BTC), in providing training statewide.

“One of the things we are learning in fire service is that new things are coming in our direction, and we need to be prepared,” Melendez said. “This kind of training is critical right now; we aren’t looking at this as future technology, this technology is here now and we need to respond. This class will give tools to identify and recognize hazards, respond and be safe. It brings a new perspective to our service.”

Thousands of California emergency personnel are expected to gain training with this program. Courses range from 8 to 24 hours and many can also be conducted at the employer’s location. Partner colleges include: Rio Hondo College, College of the Desert, Cerritos College, Long Beach City College, Kern College District, Barstow Community College, City College of San Francisco, Riverside Community College, College of the Canyons, and San Diego Miramar College.

“Chief Melendez, along with his ECC colleague retired Captain Mark Wilde, has been of tremendous assistance to us in developing curriculum for the program, along with sharing with other partners across the state,” said the BTC’s Davidson. “They have become major spokesmen for this type training.”

The program is part of the El Camino College Business Training Center’s Alternative and Renewable Fuel and Vehicle Technology Program, designed to provide alternative fuel vehicle (AFV) training to incumbent workers of any California public entity employer, county regional transit authority, city, municipality, and/or business engaged in alternative and renewable fuel and vehicle technologies.

The BTC received a \$750,000 grant to implement a training program for employers that are engaged in mass transit, alternative fuels, transportation maintenance, and fleet services to support the Alternative and Renewable Fuel and Vehicle Technology Program, created in 2007 under Assembly Bill 118.

Much of the training costs are offset through the grant. The overall goal of the program is to support a transition from petroleum-based transportation to alternative and renewable fuels and clean, low carbon vehicle technologies. Other courses available through the grant include: hybrid vehicle safety, maintenance and diagnostics, advanced engine control systems and diagnostics, fuel system inspection, CNG engine specific/fuel systems operation and diagnostic, utility equipment hydraulics, electrical-voltmeter, schematics, electricity principles, biofuels storage, transport, fleet operations and use, first responder- alternative fuels (CNG, ING, hydrogen), and sustainable management systems.

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