NORTHERN MAINE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

News Release

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NMCC students and County automotive refinishing professionals get glimpse into the "green" future

Aroostook County **-** Use water-based paint on your car? Sound crazy? Well, you might just be surprised.

Northern Maine Community College's automotive collision repair lab was recently the site of two demonstrations for Cromax Pro, a water-based product as opposed to a solvent-based paint. The new system is a "green" alternative to automotive refinishing, producing fewer emissions and less hazardous waste for disposal.

The first clinic was presented by DuPont Performance Coatings along with CarQuest Auto Parts of Presque Isle. Twenty-six car shop owners, technicians, and painters from Houlton to Fort Kent traveled to the NMCC campus to attend the seminar. Presenters were Troy Tompkins and Gregg Richardson from DuPont; and Marc Pinpal from DeVilbiss Corporation featuring spraying and drying equipment. Among those taking part in the session were Alan Luetjen, PBE (paint body and equipment) manager for CarQuest Automotive Finishes in Bangor, as well as Jason Knowles, local sales manager, and Jamie Daigle, store manager, from CarQuest in Presque Isle.

"The implementation of waterborne paint is a giant step for the refinish industry as we know it," said Bob Collins, NMCC's automotive collision repair instructor. "Paint companies have been working with water technology since the 1970s. Primers have been available since the mid 1980s, but have not been feasible for everyday use. This product is more 'user friendly' and with a few shop modifications and adjustment in the way a painter applies it, they will be fine."

According to Tompkins, who is the marketing representative for Dupont Performance Coatings in Maine, in an attempt to protect the environment and preserve the ozone layer there have been several mandates put in place to reduce the amount of VOC's (Volitile Organic Compounds) in automotive basecoat systems. These VOC's are measured in pounds per gallon and are currently running in the 5 lb per gallon range, the new requirements will be reduced to 3.5 pounds per gallon.

These standards are being adopted in different air quality regions as decided by their governing council. Maine is part of the OTC (Ozone Transportation Commision), consisting of 12 states from Virginia to Maine and also including Washinton DC. The OTC set a date of January 2012 for the mandate, which means local shops have a couple of years to comply. These standards have already been adopted in certain regions of California and Canada for a couple of years now.

The VOC ruling has paint manufacturers concentrating their efforts on waterborne technology due to the unique pigmentation and need to achieve color match on the various alternates in the field. Each car color has many alternate formulas for the same color, depending on manufacturing facility and many other variables. Although companies have the ability to make a 3.5 VOC solvent borne coating, they don't have the ability to hit the color spectrum needed for invisible repairs with such a product.

"Our Cromax Pro brand waterborne line of basecoat meets all of the requirements and has some added benefits for the end users [body shops]," said Tompkins. "One of the major benefits is the one trip application in the spray booth compared to multiple coats with a solvent borne basecoat and even our competitors waterborne basecoat systems. We apply one cross coat application, which is basically applying a double wet pass with no flash between coats, as opposed to traditional systems that could take up to four or five trips in the booth to achieve coverage due to transparency of the basecoat on certain colors. That translates into better coverage with less application time and less product."

"After going to the first clinic, I really wanted to get my hands on it and try it with my students," said Collins of the Cromax Pro product. "This change [from solvent-based to water-based paint] is happening, and we need to be learning how to use it." Collins was able to coordinate a return visit by Tompkins when the semester got underway in January. Tompkins brought product for the students to work with, so they were able to go into the paint booth and apply the paint to a vehicle, experiencing first-hand how the product goes on and how it dries. He also left some product for Collins to use with his students during the semester.

Collins plans on using both products in his classes from this point on or until solvent-based coats are discontinued. "The folks leaving here who enter into a trade will be working with waterborne paints very soon, and they need to be prepared," he said.

According to Tompkins, DuPont has been doing information seminars with hands-on demonstrations of this new technology for their body shop customers and distributors, so they can see what the future holds.

"Along with the help of CarQuest, we were fortunate to be able to do both the clinic for professionals as well as the one for students at NMCC, demonstrating the Cromax Pro line along with a couple of new products that relate to the system," said Tompkins. "As always we had great support from the College and Bob Collins, who always welcomes and encourages us to keep the industry informed in new products and procedures. It's really nice to have such a facility and instructor to offer this type of training, along with a distributor like CarQuest to help us get the message out."

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Bob Collins (on left with hose), Northern Maine Community College's automotive collision repair instructor, applies a waterborne paint to a vehicle in his lab's spray booth as he and his students take part in a hands-on demonstration of a product from DuPont.

Troy Tompkins (far right), from DuPont Performance Coatings, prepares a spray equipment for applying water-based paint as part of a hands-on demonstration he led on January 12 for students in Northern Maine Community College's automotive collision repair program. Among the students taking part were, from left: Tyler Martin of Caribou, Betsey McPherson of Litchfield and Kurtis Perkins of Mapleton.