

BMH 'MediDocks' called first in the nation

By [BOB AUDETTE / Reformer Staff](#)

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Governor Shumlin shakes hands with Rescue Chief Mark Considine during the unveiling of the new MediDocks at the Brattleboro Memorial Hospital, Monday afternoon. (Zachary P. Stephens/Reformer)

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BRATTLEBORO -- It seems like a no-brainer.

For the past two decades, commercial truck stops around the country have been equipped with electrical outlets and heating, ventilation and air conditioning devices to prevent long-haul truckers from idling their diesel engines for extended periods.

Why hasn't that technology been adapted elsewhere, perhaps at hospitals, where diesel fumes can affect their mission of healing illness and injury and promoting health?

Believe it or not, on Monday, Brattleboro Memorial Hospital became the first in the nation to install "MediDocks," free-standing devices that supply electricity and HVAC to ambulances.

"Once you've done it, it's obvious," said Harold



Officials unveil the new MediDocks at the Brattleboro Memorial Hospital, Monday afternoon. (Zachary P. Stephens/Reformer)

Garabedine, a contractor that has been working with the state to get MediDocks installed at hospitals. "It's like, how do you get that first pickle out of the jar?"

Garabedine said of all the hospitals he has pitched the idea to so far, Brattleboro Memorial had the greatest willingness to take the project on.

On Monday, Gov. Peter Shumlin stopped by to observe the MediDocks in operation.

"This is a big deal," he said. "Everything we can do to curb idling and keep people healthy is a step in the right direction."

Shumlin said exhaust fumes from idling and "bad air" cost the state \$30 million every year in health care costs.

Not only will turning off the diesel engines save the cost of fuel, but it will also prevent

exhaust fumes from wafting into BMH's emergency room every time the door opens.

After Rescue Inc. drops a patient off at the hospital, emergency medical responders often spend up to an hour taking care of paperwork and transferring information to doctors and nurses.

During that time, they had to leave their ambulances running to protect fragile medicine that shouldn't warm up in the summer or freeze in the winter.

"We worked with the hospital to make this happen," said Mark Considine, Rescue's chief of operations.

Tom Moyer, Vermont's mobile services manager, who seeks solutions to prevent transportation-related air pollution, said the state has been aware of the problem of exhaust from idling ambulances for a while and studied the truck-stop technology before proposing it to hospitals around the state.

"BMH was the first hospital to step up to the plate," said Moyer.

His counterpart in New Hampshire, Felice Janelle, said the Granite State hopes to learn from Vermont and install similar devices at its hospitals.

"It shouldn't be too hard of a sell," she said, adding she hopes to speak soon with administrators at Cheshire Medical Center/Dartmouth-Hitchcock in Keene, N.H., because of its proximity to Brattleboro.

Jeff Seyler, the CEO for the American Lung Association of the Northeast, said BMH's MediDocks can serve as an example for other hospitals around the country.

"Multiply this by the thousands of facilities around the country and you could really make a dent in air pollution," said Seyler.

Bob Audette can be reached at raudette@reformer.com, or at 802-254-2311, ext. 160.