

Small-Engine Makers Voice Worry As EPA Weighs New Ethanol

By **MARK LONG**

NEW YORK—Boaters and small-engine-industry groups are worried their concerns about engine damage will be overlooked as the Environmental Protection Agency considers allowing as much as 15% ethanol in the nation's gasoline.

Since fuel with an ethanol content of up to 10% has been introduced across the U.S. in recent years, boaters have complained of problems. Now they are lobbying the EPA to test the effects of ethanol on small engines—in addition to the testing being done on car and truck engines—as the regulator weighs increasing the ethanol content.

"We don't have the science on it," said Margaret Podlich, vice president of government affairs of the Boat Owners Association of the United States. "We don't know what this will do to marine engines."

Backers of allowing additional ethanol in the fuel mix cite reduced greenhouse-gas emissions, the possibility of job creation, and the need to meet a federal mandate to increase use of biofuels.

The EPA has postponed a final decision on raising the ethanol limit until next year amid concerns among oil companies and vehicle makers. In an emailed statement, the agency said it would look at all data submitted to it for both on-road and non-road sources, and that testing smaller engines, such as marine outboards, was being discussed.

As a solvent, ethanol frees up the gunk in fuel tanks and engines that can clog carburetors and fuel lines. The blended fuel can also cause problems if it separates when stored for lengthy periods—as boats commonly are—creating safety worries, especially when boats are used offshore.

Chris Thorne, a spokesman for ethanol industry group Growth Energy, said boaters "have a legitimate concern," but noted that the EPA wasn't considering mandating use of 15% ethanol, adding that consumers would have time to prepare and that the different fuel blends would be clearly labeled.

"This is not going to be a surprise to anybody," Mr. Thorne said. "We have been through the process of changing fuel systems before."

The Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, which represents makers of lawnmowers, chain saws and other power gear, said it is "deeply concerned" since educating millions of consumers to prevent potentially dangerous misfueling would be "a daunting task."

Small-engine makers are particularly concerned about the potential liability associated with accidents or strandings due to engine failures caused by extra ethanol in the fuel mix.

Mat Dunn, legislative director of the National Marine Manufacturers Association, said he welcomed the EPA's additional testing, but was worried about potential boating-safety problems and complicating the fuel market for consumers. He said his industry group has no statistics to illustrate the scale of boaters' difficulties with ethanol-blended fuel, but that it anecdotally hears of complaints "all the time."

Having ethanol in the fuel "was a disaster for us," said Bill Bahen, executive director of Hudson River Community Sailing in Manhattan. He said the six gasoline outboard engines purchased new last year for the nonprofit sailing school and club's sailboats broke down repeatedly with carburetor and fuel-line problems, and were never all running at the same time this year, disrupting activities.

Other boating organizations echoed Mr. Bahen. "The ethanol created a litany of things that we had to do," said Nick Judson, executive director of the nonprofit Nantucket Community Sailing. "Our maintenance bills definitely went up."

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