



07-23-09

Renewable Fuels Assoc. seeks immediate EPA OK for E12

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Answering senators' questions Wednesday in a Senate Agriculture Committee hearing on climate change legislation, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Lisa Jackson said that EPA has until Dec. 1st to decide on whether to raise the limit on the ethanol blend with gasoline from the current 10% (E10) to 15% (E15). Jackson said EPA needs time to evaluate the flood of public comments received on the waiver request before the comment period ended July 20th.

In response, Renewable Fuels Association (RFA) President Bob Dinneen said Thursday that "We need not wait until EPA decides on the formal E15 waiver request to increase the amount of ethanol we use." He explained that the EPA has the authority to approve an E12 blend immediately, saying "This interim and legally supported step of approving E12 blends would provide an immediate boost to America's ethanol producers and provide gasoline marketers the flexibility they need to meet the requirements of the Renewable Fuels Standard and capitalize on the cost savings associated with increased ethanol blending. "

RFA maintains that both the science and existing statute will compel EPA to approve a waiver authorizing E15. But under the law, EPA has 270 days to consider the request. According to RFA, EPA has authority to define E12 blends as "substantially similar" to fuels used in certified motor vehicles. The basis for this conclusion is that the weight percentage of oxygen that EPA allows in oxygenated gasoline actually equates to an oxygen percentage that would be present in 12% ethanol blends. Ethanol as a fuel additive is an oxygenate. Including ethanol raises the oxygen content of gasoline, causing for a cleaner, more complete combustion of gasoline.

Much of the concern being raised has to do with the amount of oxygen in gasoline as a result of increased ethanol use and increased combustion temperatures. RFA points out that it is likely that fuels containing oxygen levels equal to those in E12 have been in the marketplace since the early 1990s.

To read RFA's 17-page comments requesting that EPA authorize sales of E15, go to: <http://www.agri-pulse.com/uploaded/20090723H1.pdf>