

# Boat Owners, Manufacturers Fear Ethanol-Tinged Gas

Derek Harper, Associated Press

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. (AP) — Gasoline may soon include more ethanol, but people who work on boats and small engines say they fear the change will lead to many more damaged engines and costly repair bills.

Even though the federal Environmental Protection Agency did not approve the blend for many types of engines, some may still inadvertently fuel their craft at a station that sells it.

"The problem is they (boats) can't run anything more than 10 percent" alcohol in those engines, said Andy Biddle, 36, of Northfield.

Biddle, who manages Professional Boat Sales at Sea Village Marina on Margate Boulevard in Northfield, said he and others have warned boaters to avoid the new blends, which can include as much as 15 percent ethanol. Sea Village Marina does not sell gas. But Biddle said the company is putting together a flier to alert boaters who dock at the marina of the potential problems.

Jim Dunkelberger, owner of Cape Power Equipment of Cape May Court House, said he thought that more than 70 percent of his current repair business is due to ethanol corrosion.

"It's created a lot of work," he said. "When they do what they're trying to do, it will create a whole lot more."

He recommended people either drain their snowblowers and lawnmowers, or run them until the tanks are empty. Additives are good, but they will not do well in long-term storage.

Small engines are "barely holding on at 10 percent" alcohol in gasoline, Dunkelberger said. "You go to 15 percent, you'll have real problems."

The EPA has sanctioned ethanol in gasoline for more than 30 years, as a way for gasoline engines to burn cleaner. The most common blend is E10, or a fuel with 10 percent alcohol and 90 percent gasoline. The EPA first mandated ethanol use in cities and states such as New Jersey with air quality problems.

In October, the Environmental Protection Agency approved increasing the amount of ethanol that can be blended into gasoline from 10 to 15 percent for cars built from 2007 to the present. Last month the agency expanded the use of that fuel, "E15," to include cars, SUVs and light trucks built since 2001.

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Boats, small engines, motorcycles and off-road vehicles were excluded because of the potential damage. The EPA is expected to require gas stations that dispense "E15" to mark the pumps with warning stickers. It is unclear when the gasoline will arrive locally. A survey of several stations found no station selling it.

The recent increase follows the federal Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007, which calls for significantly increasing biofuels such as ethanol in the nation's fuel supply.

The National Marine Manufacturers Association challenged the increase with a federal suit in December.

Ethanol is typically made from corn in this country. Consequently, critics have blamed the increased use of corn in the ethanol market for rising global corn prices, which elevates food prices, as well as deforestation as people seek to grow crops elsewhere. Critics have also said ethanol boosts water usage for the additional crops.

Ethanol supporters such as Growth Energy, an ethanol advocacy group based in Washington, D.C. and Omaha, Neb., say expanding its use increases energy independence by replacing gasoline with a home-grown alternative that would provide jobs for Americans. It has challenged assertions that increased ethanol comes at the expense of food, saying other factors are involved.

Growth Energy has said that up to 90 percent of the nation's gasoline usage could be replaced in 20 years. The Renewable Fuels Association has said 62 percent of vehicles now on the road can use "E15," or a gasoline blend containing between 10 and 15 percent ethanol.

Regardless, the Boat Owners Association of the United States warned that older engines might not be able to compensate for additional alcohol in gasoline, burning hotter than normal and potentially creating damage.

Dan Connor, a small engine mechanic with Swanson Hardware Supply in Vineland, said he has seen more and more engines damaged by ethanol-blended gasoline, to the point that practically every piece of equipment is affected.

"I just did two chainsaws today," Connor said Monday.

Before, he said he could store gasoline for a year or two, but gasoline now goes bad in four or five months, turning black or a really dark green.

In two-stroke engines, common in smaller machines like lawnmowers, oil blended into the gasoline lubricates the engine as it burns. But he said in his experience, ethanol appeared to be keeping that lubrication from happening.

Connor said consumers should either use stabilizers in the gasoline, or drain the tank entirely.

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Connor said he had his own engine problems with ethanol-blended gasoline last summer.

He and a friend took his friend's center console boat on a fishing trip off Long Island in New York. They put in new fuel injectors and gas lines, but once they were out in the ocean, the engine failed.

They eventually got the engine restarted and returned to port, he said. They ran the engine at full throttle, but only proceeded at a stately five miles per hour.

While newer engines may handle the fuel with minimal problems, Biddle said, "older boat engines, from the '80s and '90s ... E15 will absolutely destroy these engines."

Tracy Blumenstein, 45, owner of Professional Boat Sales, said he suggested boaters use an enzyme additive to kill algae growth that may increase with E15 use, as well as fuel stabilizers to keep the fuel from separating.

Boaters should also consider replacing fuel lines with alcohol-resistant lines, upgrading fuel filters, and consider replacing fiberglass fuel tanks with metal ones that are less likely to corrode, Blumenstein said.

In the meantime, the Boat Owners Association of the United States warned that people who transport their boats on trailers need to remain extra vigilant when filling up at a local gas station.

"When filling up at gas stations, boaters are used to pulling up to the pump and filling up the tow vehicle first, and then putting the same fuel nozzle into the boat," said BoatUS Director of Damage Avoidance Bob Adriance. "If that happens with E15, it could be a big mistake."

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