

EPA ADMINISTRATOR CAROL M. BROWNER
REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY
Press Conference
March 20, 2000

Today I am here to deliver a very simple but important message: It is imperative that we significantly reduce or eliminate the fuel additive MTBE from gasoline and boost the use of safe alternatives like ethanol in order to protect U.S. water supplies and to preserve air quality benefits.

Today, we are moving on two fronts to ensure that MTBE is significantly reduced or eliminated from gasoline:

First, the Clinton/Gore Administration is providing Congress with a legislative framework, which, if fully adopted, will significantly reduce or eliminate MTBE while preserving clean-air benefits by ensuring the use and growth of ethanol and other safe renewables in fuels.

Second, as a backstop measure, today we are announcing that EPA is beginning regulatory action aimed at eliminating MTBE from gasoline. Under Section 6 of the Toxic Substances Control Act, we are taking the first step by issuing what is called an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to ban MTBE from gasoline. This action is the best tool legally available for eliminating the use of MTBE.

The principles for legislative action that we are sending to Congress must be viewed and accepted as a single package and will provide an environmentally sound and cost effective approach to dealing with this issue:

First, we are calling on Congress to amend the Clean Air Act to significantly reduce or eliminate the use of MTBE in gasoline, in order to protect drinking water.

Second, we are calling on Congress to strengthen the Clean Air Act to guarantee that clean air benefits are preserved.

And finally, we are calling on Congress to remove the requirement from the Clean Air Act that has led to a three-fold increase in the use of MTBE, while, at the same time, taking the unprecedented step of providing content levels for ethanol and other safe biofuels in gasoline.

These principles will ensure that the MTBE problem is addressed as soon as possible. . . that our commitment to cleaner air is preserved . . .that America's waters are protected . . .and that we continue to create important opportunities for renewable fuels in our nation's energy supply.

Legislative action is our first priority and the best way for America to address the MTBE problem.

As I noted, however, we also are taking out an additional insurance policy today. We are backing up our request for timely legislation with the first step in a regulatory action under the Toxic Substances Control Act.

That Act gives EPA authority to ban, phase out, limit or control the manufacture of any chemical substance deemed to pose an unreasonable risk to the public or the environment. But the procedural burdens required by the Act can be weighty and time consuming. That is why we still are requesting that Congress act immediately to significantly reduce or eliminate MTBE in gasoline. Legislative action is the first and best line of defense. We look forward to working with the Congress to achieve that critical legislative goal.

The use of MTBE in gasoline in the U.S. has increased three-fold primarily in the last decade. Because of growing environmental concerns, I convened a Blue Ribbon Panel in 1998 which concluded that MTBE did, in fact, pose unique threats to water supplies. As a result, last summer we first called on Congress to phase out the use of MTBE in gasoline. Today, we are taking the next steps.

EPA continues to work with those cities and states that need help cleaning up existing problems. Remediation will be challenging, but essential. And we are working to develop and promote new cleanup technologies. We also are strengthening our efforts to make storage tanks more secure.

MTBE is a problem that must be addressed. If we delay too long, the problem will become worse. The time has come to take action. Americans deserve both clean air and clean water and never one at the expense of the other.