

The Blue Ribbon Panel on Oxygenates in Gasoline

For More Information:

Bob O'Keefe, 617 876 6700

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**PANEL CALLS FOR ACTION TO PROTECT WATER QUALITY WHILE
MAINTAINING AIR BENEFITS FROM NATIONAL CLEAN BURNING GAS**

Washington, D.C. --- Congress, U.S. EPA, and the states should take action to improve Federal Reformulated Gas (RFG) to maintain the substantial air quality benefits of the program while protecting the nation's water supplies from contamination by additives used in the cleaner burning gasoline, according to a report issued today by the independent Blue Ribbon Panel appointed late last year to advise U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Carol Browner.

"The RFG program has been a tremendous help to air quality," said Dan Greenbaum, Chair of the Blue Ribbon Panel and President of the Health Effects Institute. "We urge all parties to take quick action to preserve these benefits while minimizing current and future contamination of the nation's drinking water supplies," he added

In the wake of reports of the detection of the additive MTBE (Methyl Tertiary Butyl Ether) in drinking water supplies in Maine, California, and elsewhere, the Blue Ribbon Panel - which consisted of experts on air and water quality, as well as representatives of the oil, ethanol, and MTBE industry and the environmental community (see attached list) - was convened to investigate the facts of the situation. Based on its investigation, the Panel called on U.S. EPA to work with Congress and the states to implement a 4-part package of reforms to ensure that water supplies are better protected while the substantial reductions in air pollution that have resulted

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from RFG are maintained. Specifically, the Panel:

- Recommended a comprehensive set of improvements to the nation's water protection programs, including over 20 specific actions to enhance Underground Storage Tank, Safe Drinking Water, and private well protection programs.
- Agreed broadly that use of MTBE should be reduced substantially (with some members supporting its complete phase out), and that Congress should act to provide clear federal and state authority to regulate and/or eliminate the use of MTBE and other gasoline additives that threaten drinking water supplies;
- Recommended that Congress act to remove the current Clean Air Act requirement - that 2% of RFG, by weight, consist of oxygen - to ensure that adequate fuel supplies can be blended in a cost-effective manner while reducing usage of MTBE; and
- Recommended that EPA seek mechanisms to ensure that there is no loss of current air quality benefits.

In recommending the lifting of the oxygen requirement, the Panel recognized that Congress enacted the requirement to advance several national policy goals (e.g. energy security, agricultural policy) that were beyond the Panel's scope, and expects that Congress would likely seek other mechanisms to meet these same national interests.

Although the Panel agreed broadly on its recommendations, two members, while agreeing with most recommendations, had concerns with specific provisions: the MTBE industry representative felt that the water protection reforms proposed by the Panel were sufficient to protect water supplies and was concerned that the Panel had not adequately considered the air quality benefits of oxygenates, and the ethanol industry representative was concerned that the Panel's recommendation to lift the oxygen requirement did not adequately reflect the benefits of using oxygenates. (Their statements are attached to the Executive Summary and Recommendations).

The Panel arrived at these recommendations after conducting a six-month investigation of the issues, holding field hearings in the Northeast and in California, and reviewing dozens of in-depth analyses of the issue. Based on that review the Panel found:

- RFG has provided substantial reductions in the emissions of a number of air pollutants from motor vehicles, most notably volatile organic compounds (precursors of ozone), carbon monoxide, and mobile-source air toxics (benzene, 1,3-butadiene, and others), in most cases resulting in emissions reductions that exceed those required by law.

- There have been growing detections of MTBE in drinking water, with between 5% and 10% of drinking water supplies in RFG areas showing detectable amounts of MTBE. The great majority of these detections to date have been below levels of public health concern, with approximately one percent rising to levels above 20 ppb. Detections at lower levels have, however, raised consumer taste and odor concerns that have caused water suppliers to stop using some water supplies and to incur costs of treatment and remediation. The contaminated wells include private wells that are less well protected than public drinking water supplies and not monitored for chemical contamination. There is also evidence of contamination of surface waters, particularly during summer boating seasons.
- The major source of groundwater contamination appears to be releases from underground gasoline storage systems (UST). These systems have been upgraded over the last decade, likely resulting in reduced risk of leaks. However, approximately 20% of the storage systems have not yet been upgraded, and there continue to be reports of releases from some upgraded systems, due to inadequate design, installation, maintenance, and/or operation. In addition, many fuel storage systems (e.g. farms, small above-ground tanks) are not currently regulated by U.S. EPA. Beyond groundwater contamination from UST sources, the other major sources of water contamination appear to be small and large gasoline spills to ground and surface waters, and recreational water craft - particularly those with older motors - releasing unburned fuel to surface waters.

“ We have a successful cleaner-burning gasoline program in place,” concluded Greenbaum, “but we need to take action on a variety of fronts to ensure that the detections of MTBE in drinking water that we have seen - and which fortunately in the great majority of cases have not been of public health concern - do not continue to grow.”

Copies of the Panel’s *Executive Summary and Recommendations* are available at its Website: <http://www.epa.gov/oms/consumer/fuels/oxypanel/blueribb.htm> or from the Panel’s Designated federal official; Ms. Karen Smith, U.S. EPA, 202-564-9674. The full report of the Panel, including background issue summaries prepared as a result of the Panel’s deliberations, is in production currently and will be available in late August.

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Members of the Blue Ribbon Panel

Dan Greenbaum, Health Effects Institute, Chair
Mark Buehler, Metropolitan Water District, So. California
Robert Campbell, CEO, Sun Oil
Patricia Ellis, Hydrogeologist, Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental
Conservation
Linda Greer, Natural Resources Defense Council
Jason Grumet, NESCAUM
Anne Happel, Lawrence Livermore Nat. Lab
Carol Henry, American Petroleum Institute
Michael Kenny, California Air Resources Board
Robert Sawyer, University of California, Berkeley
Todd Sneller, Nebraska Ethanol Board
Debbie Starnes, Lyondell Chemical
Ron White, American Lung Assoc.

Federal representatives (Non-Voting):

Robert Perciasepe, Air and Radiation, US EPA
Roger Conway, US Dept. of Agriculture
Cynthia Dougherty, Drinking Water, U.S. EPA
William Farland, Risk Assessment, US EPA
Barry McNutt, US DOE
Margo Oge, Mobile Sources, US EPA
Samuel Ng, Underground Tanks, US EPA
Mary White, ATSDR
John Zogorski, USGS