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EPA ANNOUNCES BLUE-RIBBON PANEL TO REVIEW USE OF MTBE AND OTHER OXYGENATES IN GASOLINE

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Carol M. Browner today announced that a blue-ribbon panel of leading experts from the public health and scientific communities, automotive fuels industry, water utilities, and local and State government will be created to review the important issues posed by the use of MTBE and other oxygenates in gasoline. While MTBE and other oxygenates have provided the nation with important clean air benefits, EPA is creating this panel to gain a better understanding of the public health concerns raised by the discovery of MTBE in some water supplies.

The panel will be chaired by Dr. Daniel Greenbaum, President of the Health Effects Institute (HEI), Cambridge, MA and Robert Perciasepe, Assistant Administrator for Air and Radiation at U.S. EPA. Under the direction of Dr. Greenbaum, HEI recently published major reviews on *The Health Effects of Diesel Exhaust* and, *The Health Effects of Oxygenates Added to Gasoline*.

“While MTBE and other oxygenates in gasoline have improved air quality for millions of Americans, I am convening a blue-ribbon panel of experts to better understand public health concerns that have been raised by the discovery of MTBE in some water bodies,” said EPA Administrator Carol M. Browner. “Our goal is to protect public health and the environment by ensuring both cleaner air and cleaner water.

“Dr. Greenbaum is uniquely qualified to head this panel because of his extensive experience in the area of health effects and fuel additives. He will be working with members who represent a broad range of expertise regarding oxygenated gasolines.”

The blue-ribbon panel, under the auspices of the Clean Air Act Advisory Committee, will: 1) examine the role of oxygenates in meeting the nation’s goal of clean air, 2) evaluate each product’s efficiency in providing clean air benefits and the existence of alternatives, 3) assess the behavior of oxygenates in the environment, 4) review any known health effects, and 5) compare the cost of production and use, and each product’s availability-- both at present and in the future. The panel will also study the causes of groundwater and drinking water contamination from motor vehicle fuels, and explore prevention and cleanup technologies for water and soil.

Within six months, this panel will report to EPA its findings, including specific recommendations on how to ensure public health protection and continued improvement in both air and water quality.

The Clean Air Act of 1990 requires the use of emissions-reducing oxygenated fuels in areas failing to meet national health standards. The Act does not specify which oxygenates are to be used in making cleaner-burning gasoline, leaving that decision to the manufacturer. MTBE, or methyl tertiary butyl ether, and ethanol frequently are selected by refiners for producing cleaner-burning gasolines.

In a separate but related action, the EPA also is directing the fuels industry to conduct a new program required under the Clean Air Act to assess the potential health effects associated with all gasolines and gasoline additives -- conventional gasoline as well as gasoline that has been reformulated with oxygenates by manufacturers. The information provided will help the Agency better understand the health risks associated with exposure to automotive fuels.