

2016: Looking Back on a Busy Year

Urban Air Initiative's work in 2016 covered many bases. This column appears in the December print issue of Ethanol Producer Magazine.

By Dave VanderGriend | November 09, 2016

It is hard to believe we are approaching the end of the year. And what a busy year it has been. At the Urban Air Initiative, we have been relentless in our efforts to open the market for higher ethanol blends. The road to that market runs a little north of us, right through the U.S. EPA fuels office based in Michigan. We have mailed our Christmas wish list, but we generally get a lump of coal!

We have written extensively in this column that the EPA has the authority—and the obligation—to break down regulatory barriers holding ethanol back. At UAI we have identified those barriers and offered solutions. But being heard has not been easy. During 2016, we have worked hard to understand where EPA has gotten it wrong. We have challenged the agency to open its eyes to the best available science that shows ethanol to be significantly better than EPA's models and ingrained beliefs would indicate.

One of the less glamorous things we do is to comment on EPA rules and actions. Our comments on the renewable fuel standard focused on the health benefits and CO2 reductions from ethanol. We also invoked the Information Quality Act which requires the EPA use the most accurate, up-to-date science and information, submitting an outstanding compilation of the most contemporary information available on ethanol's positive impact on the environment.

We continued to target EPA emissions modeling that is based on a flawed study conducted with the petroleum industry. Through emails UAI obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, we see how the petroleum industry has influenced virtually every major ruling impacting ethanol. Based on these internal EPA documents, we submitted a Request for Correction on the study, while preparing to challenge EPA in court over the use of its modeling.

Similarly, through another FOIA request, we found that an EPA researcher skewed the results of a study with the Harvard School of Public Health by downplaying the significant health risks from gasoline aromatics.

We submitted comments on the Technical Assessment Report that is the key to the midterm evaluation of federal fuel economy and carbon reduction requirements. We provided substantial, documented information that calls on EPA to look beyond vehicle technology and recognize that fuels—notably clean-burning ethanol—can be a valuable tool. We are pleased to be offering technical assistance to former Sen. Tom Daschle's High Octane Low Carbon Alliance on this particular issue.

UAI also is sharing technical and educational information with the E30 Challenge in Watertown, South Dakota, as participants demonstrate that simply splash-blending ethanol with E10 can provide a clean, high-octane premium fuel that is compatible with today's vehicles and reduces a range of pollutants. We also are communicating the benefits of higher ethanol blends to the public, the medical community, academia and the media. We launched two websites this year, fixourfuel.com and fuelingthetruth.com. We continue to support the Clean Fuels Omaha campaign that has resulted in the first major metropolitan area recommending higher blends to combat ozone. We produced white papers, fact sheets and technical assessments on a range of critical issues. We are actively involved with the American Society of Testing and Materials, the Society of Automotive Engineers and the Coordinating Research Council. We presented about aromatics in Mexico City and to others at international workshops sponsored by the USDA and U.S. Grains Council to educate about and advocate for higher ethanol blending.

We sponsored conferences such as the outstanding panel of auto and health experts at the International Fuel Ethanol Workshop. We've helped bring panel discussions to Congress in Washington and placed articles and thought pieces with media across the country.

UAI staff is working with ethanol producers nationwide and coordinating with industry and commodity groups to share our findings. We will be supporting a Health Effects Institute event later this month and have more outreach efforts planned for 2017. Like I said, we have been busy.

We appreciate the support for Urban Air from so many organizations. I wish everyone a blessed Thanksgiving and Merry Christmas and let's continue to work together to tell the real story of ethanol and the benefits it provides.



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