



3337A Emerald Ln.
P O Box 104898
Jefferson City, MO
65110-4898
(573) 635-3893 *phone*
(800) 841-5849
(573) 635-7913 *fax*
www.biodiesel.org

NEWS

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Contact: Jenna Higgins/NBB
800-841-5849

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Study Shows Biodiesel Industry Steps Up to Fuel Quality Challenge

BQ-9000 quality assurance program shines

ORLANDO, Fla. – The aggressive fuel quality outreach program put into place by the National Biodiesel Board (NBB) has demonstrated positive results. A new study by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) shows the biodiesel industry has achieved a high degree of success in meeting national fuel quality standards.

According to the results, which NREL Senior Chemist Teresa Alleman presented today at the National Biodiesel Conference & Expo in Orlando, Fla., the in-spec samples represent 90 percent of the biodiesel produced in the U.S. last year. This demonstrates a significant improvement in fuel quality since a previous NREL survey in 2006.

This conclusion is based on a relatively large sample size. The sample covered 70 percent of actual U.S. production in 2007 and is believed by NREL to be representative of biodiesel production nationwide. NREL, a Department of Energy laboratory based in Golden, Colo., collected the samples from biodiesel producers between April and October 2007. The plants made biodiesel from different vegetable oils and fats, and ranged in actual production from 3,000 to 30 million gallons per year. NREL then tested each sample for the most critical parameters required by ASTM D 6751, the national standard for biodiesel.

“These data show that the biodiesel industry has achieved dramatic improvements in fuel quality since 2006,” said Steve Howell, NBB Technical Director. “We expect that this trend will continue so that virtually all biodiesel sold in the U.S. meets these requirements in the very near future.”

The study showed that plants certified under BQ-9000, the industry’s voluntary quality control program, fared the best. BQ-9000 producers consistently hit the mark, no matter how large or small the plant.

According to NREL, the one sample that was out of specification from a BQ-9000 producer was most likely a sampling or contamination error, not an actual manufacturing issue. There are 27 companies certified under BQ-9000. Industry-wide, those producers represent about 75 percent of biodiesel produced.

(more)

“In the summer of 2006, our Board of Directors put into place a strong fuel quality policy with the goal of increasing the level of in-specification biodiesel in the U.S. to 100 percent,” said Joe Jobe, CEO of the National Biodiesel Board (NBB). “The NBB’s outreach efforts with enforcement agencies and our investment in the BQ-9000 program have yielded terrific results, and we’ll continue to push for 100 percent.”

In addition to putting more resources into BQ-9000, the NBB has worked with the Internal Revenue Service and Environmental Protection Agency on enforcing fuel quality. In order to receive the federal tax incentives for biodiesel, the biodiesel must meet D 6751.

NBB is also working with all state Divisions of Weights and Measures, encouraging them to adopt ASTM D 6751 into regulatory laws, and enforce it. Currently, 36 states have adopted the standard. Sixteen states now proactively test biodiesel or biodiesel blends, and 33 states will react to complaints about out-of-spec biodiesel. An online Fuel Quality Enforcement Guide (www.biodiesel.org/resources/fuelqualityguide) provides guidance on actions for anyone who has concerns that a company might not be producing in-spec fuel.

“ASTM standards are in place to protect consumers, and demonstrating that the vast majority of our producers are meeting that standard will continue to build consumer confidence,” said Howell. “This will also reassure engine makers that their growing support for biodiesel is well-placed.”

The study confirmed that feedstock choice was irrelevant to whether the fuel met the standard. Biodiesel made from recycled cooking oil, for example, was just as likely to meet spec as fuel made from more common feedstocks like soybean oil.

Biodiesel is a cleaner burning alternative fuel that can be used in any diesel engine, usually in a blend of 20 percent or below. The use of biodiesel in a conventional diesel engine results in a substantial reduction of unburned hydrocarbons, carbon monoxide, and particulate matter.

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Readers can learn more about biodiesel by visiting www.biodiesel.org. For a list of BQ-9000 suppliers, visit www.bq-9000.org.