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New Study Made Available to the Coalition against Government Gasoline Mandates Confirms Ethanol Mandate will Hurt Wisconsin's Environment

A study released last week confirms that ethanol mandate legislation awaiting action in the Wisconsin Legislature will significantly increase harmful emissions, jeopardizing Wisconsin's ongoing efforts to meet the new air quality (ozone) standards. Legislation is currently before the Legislature (Assembly Bill 15 and Senate Bill 15) that would mandate ethanol in conventional gasoline across the state. Because this mandated fuel contains a blend of 90 percent gasoline and 10 percent alcohol, the fuel is called "E-10."

The new study, prepared for Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), evaluated fuel options that could help Southeastern Michigan meet federal clean air targets similar to Wisconsin's requirements. The study found that of the 11 fuels evaluated; only E-10 would increase both nitrogen oxide (NOx) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) emissions. NOx and VOCs combine to form ozone or smog. For both pollutants, the study concluded that the increase in emissions would be "significant."

Tom Darlington, President of Air Improvement Resource and primary author of the SEMCOG study, provided an overview of the preliminary findings to the Assembly Agriculture Committee at its Feb. 3 hearing on the proposed ethanol mandate. "I and many other experts in the field believe federal and state ozone polices will eventually have to address the known increases in VOC and NOx emissions demonstrated in the SEMCOG study," Darlington told the committee.

The prospect that the proposed ethanol mandate would add to Wisconsin's ozone problem has produced extraordinary agreement between the state's watchdog environmental groups and Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce (WMC), the state's powerful business association. At the February hearing, Jeff Schoepke, WMC's Director of Environmental Policy, opposed the mandate saying, "Our biggest concern with this Legislation is the potential negative environmental impacts an E10 mandate could have in Eastern Wisconsin." Any additional emissions associated with the mandate "...makes meeting the federal ozone health standard more difficult and more expensive.... additional controls or a lengthier period of time in violation of ozone standards will serve

to weaken relative economic strength.” The Sierra Club and Madison Audubon Society have also spoken out publicly against the mandate.

Ethanol is currently used in reformulated gasoline (RfG) required by the federal Clean Air Act for the six-county ozone non-attainment area in Southeastern Wisconsin. That formulation, however, must meet other specifications that reduce ozone pollutants and is a different fuel blend than E-10. Federal law precludes use of RfG in other areas of the state.

SEMCOG plays a similar planning role to that performed by the Southeast Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission. Supporting the evaluation were automobile manufacturing; petroleum industry experts, as well as representatives from Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, Department of Agriculture, and U.S. EPA. While building on work done in California, which is seeking a way out of its federal ethanol mandate, the SEMCOG methodology is more advanced than prior tools used by regulatory agencies to estimate fuel emissions.

Wisconsin DNR also testified at the Feb. 3 hearing on AB 15, recommending the committee impose additional mandates to mitigate the environmental impacts of the bill. One recommendation was to modify the fuel to reduce evaporation, but noting “limiting the volatility will add to the expense of the fuel.” They also recommended the committee require Wisconsin citizens use “high-tech gas cans” that cost about \$4 more than conventional cans and that all gasoline storage tanks have \$90 pressure vent caps.

“The results of the SEMCOG study are significant ,” stated Dan Gunderson, representing the Coalition against Government Gasoline Mandates. The Legislature must confront the serious environmental impacts of ethanol mandates.”

Information:

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Background: The Coalition against Government Gasoline Mandates is a coalition of petroleum marketers, environmental interests and concerned citizens.

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