

EPA seeks repair of cars damaged by bad gas

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Blenders question EPA's methods, motives

Suburban gasoline blenders say they're astounded and confused as they face tough negotiations with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in an effort to avoid a total of \$550,000 in threatened fines.

They say they're getting mixed signals from the state and federal government about their blends of gasoline and alcohol. They don't know whether the governments want them in business or not.

"They might as well wipe out the industry," shrugged a Southfield member of the 24-year-old association who asked not to be named.

He complained that the state and federal governments at first encouraged blended gasoline by reducing taxes on it. "They've led these little guys

on, and now you say 'if you haven't crossed the 1's and dotted the i's, we're going to cut you down.' Michigan's gonna go from first in this business to zero," he said.

JOSEPH CANNON, EPA assistant administrator for air and radiation, announced at a news conference Friday that EPA has issued notices to 17 blenders that the gasoline they have been selling to retailers contains too much ethanol and/or too much methanol.

"The improper use of alcohol potentially gives the violator a price advantage over his law-abiding competitor," said Cannon, who came from Washington to make the announcement at a

news conference near Metropolitan Airport.

"We do not believe the problem is a critical one yet. Most fuels do not contain improper amounts of alcohol. We are determined, though, to nip it in the bud to prevent it becoming a critical situation."

Cannon said EPA officials took fuel samples at 250 stations in southeastern Michigan and charged 17 blenders for sales to 43 retail gasoline stations. EPA is asking a fine of \$10,000 per offense — a total of \$550,000 for 55 alleged offenses.

The metropolitan Detroit area is the first place in the country where this has been done, he said.

ACTUALLY, Cannon said, EPA

wants to negotiate with the blenders for "remedial activities" and repair of cars that have been damaged by using fuels with too high levels of alcohol.

If negotiations are unsuccessful, he said, EPA will turn the cases over to the U.S. Justice Department. Prosecutors then will seek civil penalties of \$10,000 per offense in federal court. Cannon invited consumers who believe their vehicles have been damaged by use of gasoline with too much alcohol to contact either the city of Detroit consumer affairs department at 833-7793 or the state Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division in Lansing at (517) 373-1140.

ONE BLENDER stood up in the

news conference to complain the EPA charge is unfair. He was Milan Grubor of Grubor Enterprise, Southfield. EPA charges he sold gasoline with too much methanol to five dealers in Detroit and Lincoln Park last March and April.

Grubor thought the charges were ill-founded in three ways:

- He is charged with blending with excess amounts of methanol, "but my records indicate I used ethanol, not methanol. I have not ever used methanol."

- He suggested he is being blamed for the sins of others. For example, Grubor is charged in connection with sales to Zoom Gas Co. of Lincoln Park

last April 2 and 13. "I don't recall selling any gas to them in that period. . . I don't supply any of those locations 100 percent," he said.

- EPA made its highly publicized charge without visiting his office to check his records. He said he had no warning of the complaint. "They just sent me a letter the other day. I have to negotiate a settlement."

Grubor predicted devastating effects on business for him and other blenders, at least for a few weeks.

Besides Grubor, area blenders charged include Ford Oil Co. of Pontiac, Maverick Express of Birmingham, Dandy Oil of Troy, Leemon Oil Co. of Novi, By-Rite Oil Co. of Dearborn Heights, Knight Enterprises of Farmington Hills, Barrick Oil Co. of Bloomfield Hills, Tulsa Oil Corp. of Livonia and Royal Gas & Oil Co. of Ferndale.

Young starts 3rd transit panel term

Rodger Young, an attorney from Rochester, has begun his third term on the six-member Michigan Transportation Commission.

Young, 38, was recently appointed by Gov.

James Blanchard to a term expiring Dec. 22, 1986. Former Gov. William Milliken appointed him to the commission in 1979 and later reappointed him to a full three-year term.

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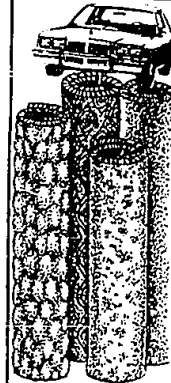
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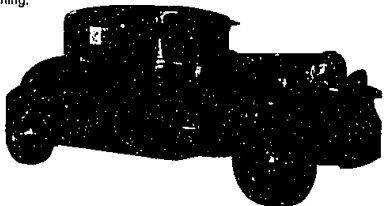
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