

Gasoline blender answers EPA charges

By Tom Beer
staff writer

Gasoline wholesaler Carroll L. Knight is on the federal government's books for \$80,000, and he doesn't like it one bit.

Knight, owner of Knight Enterprises Inc. in Farmington Hills, was one of 17 Detroit-area fuel distributors to be charged last week by the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) with selling gasoline containing illegal amounts of alcohol.

Calling himself a blender, Knight buys gasoline and ethanol (distilled grain alcohol) and mixes the two in a 90-10 blend known as gasohol, which he sells to many area gasoline stations, including 15 owned by his company.

Blenders receive federal and state tax credits on every gallon of fuel so mixed.

EPA officials claim, however, that excessive use of alcohol in the mixture causes air pollution, damages automotive parts and gives the violator a price advantage over his competitors.

Last March, EPA investigators took samples from more than 200 retail stations — including some supplied by Knight — and found 43 stations to be selling gasoline with illegal mixtures of gasoline and alcohol.

THE EPA limits the amount of ethanol in the mixture to 10 percent, and six of the stations supplied by Knight tested out at from 11 to 12.4 percent. Two other Knight-supplied stations showed small amounts of methanol, a wood alcohol product Knight says he never uses.

The charges carry maximum fines of \$10,000 on each conviction, so Knight's total bill could come to \$80,000.

But Knight, who has been in the petroleum business since 1956, says he has no intention of paying the fines.

"I think the charges are unfounded," said Knight from his office in the Greenfield Building at Grand River and Nine Mile Road. "I think they have not investigated thoroughly enough."

Knight also said he didn't like the way the EPA announced the results of its investigation — at a press conference at the Troy Hilton last week.

"It's a big political thing with them coming in here and holding a big press conference. Maybe they're trying to make up for all the bad publicity they've been getting lately."

(Rita Lavelle, former head of the EPA's toxic waste superfund, last Monday was sentenced to six months in prison and fined \$10,000 for lying to Congress about her handling of money for a hazardous waste clean-up program.)

"These tests were conducted last March, and they waited until December to send me a letter saying that I was in violation," Knight said. "Is that efficient government?"

ETHANOL, WHICH usually comes from corn, costs about \$1.70 a gallon, "so it can be asinine for a guy to give a motorist more," Knight said. "You want to use the least amount you can and still get your tax credit."

Knight said that his gasoline-ethanol mixture has always been blended properly to the best of his knowledge.

'Ethanol is such a new thing that some oil companies fight it. They'd like you to use 100-percent gasoline, obviously, because that's what they sell.'

—Carroll Knight
gasoline wholesaler

"I'm not questioning their testing procedures," he said. "I'm just saying there are 900 gallons of ethanol in every 9,000 gallons we put in the truck."

Ethanol is new to the auto fuel scene — it was first used in the late 1970s to stretch supplies of gasoline — and its presence has caused "a lot of confusion and misunderstanding among the government agencies," Knight said.

And some of the big oil companies have a financial interest in keeping blends off the market, he added.

"ETHANOL IS such a new thing that some oil companies fight it. They'd like you to use 100 percent gasoline, obviously, because that's what they sell."

Richard Kozlowski, an EPA administrator in Washington, D.C., said the agency conducted the investigation as a result of "enormous amounts of complaints" received from consumers in Wayne and Oakland counties.

"We're concerned about sloppy quality control," Kozlowski said. "It may be that there's already alcohol in the gaso-

line when they (the distributors) buy it. But it's up to them to make sure it's done right."

"You can't allow people to blend outside the waived limit on ethanol. We don't know if something like 11 percent would be harmful, but there's no telling when the rubber band is going to snap."

CONCERNING THE fines levied, Kozlowski said, "We'll sit down and discuss settling with the violators, if they're willing."

Knight said he isn't impressed with the EPA's methods.

"Their thing is, 'You want to settle?'" he said. "They want the headlines. About three years ago, they found a bunch of guys using regular gasoline in no-lead. Ask the EPA what those guys were fined. You'll find it was practically nil."

Meanwhile, Knight said he's worried about the adverse publicity the EPA's investigation may bring him and his business.

"I think all these (newspaper) articles are going to have a bad effect on us. Don't people usually believe it when their government says something?"

"BUT I'M telling you that I'm a respectable man. I've been in the petroleum business for 25 years. I'm a Farmington Hills resident and a member of the board of directors of the Farmington-area YMCA. I would not intentionally sell a product I know to be bad for automobiles or the environment."

In addition to the 15 company-owned stations, two of which are in Farmington Hills, Knight supplies gasoline to 30 stations in metropolitan Detroit, he said.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Carroll Knight: "Don't people usually believe it when their government says something?"

Citizen group considered to push plans

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capital improvements stay home instead of attending the council sessions to show their support.

WHILE MOST council members agreed with Williams that better communication is needed between the council and residents, particularly in explaining the need for some of the proposed improvements, they were also quick to point out the weaknesses of a citizen committee.

"It is the duty of someone elected to this council to determine the priorities. These buck stops here," said Councilwoman Joan Dudley.

Instead, Dudley suggested asking homeowners association presidents,

civic and community organization leaders and other residents to attend the budget sessions and meetings specifically dealing with capital improvements.

"They can go back and disseminate the information," Dudley said.

While supporting public input in determining capital improvement priorities and financing, Councilwoman Jodi Soronen said she is concerned that while the council remains responsible for all actions, another set of people will be telling the public what is happening.

"There are many opportunities for the script to fall apart," she said.

A citizen committee could provide the public with an interpretation that

actually would be misinformation, Soronen said.

BUT SEVER told council that such a problem could be prevented if before the committee attempts to sell the program to the public, the committee would decide with the council exactly what the capital program is and how it could be financed.

Because capital improvements cost money, Soronen told Williams and Sever, "we're talking tax increase. Are you going to be selling a tax increase?"

While Williams and Sever did not respond, Councilman Joe Alkateeb said that each council member was "elected to take a leadership role" and consequently the council is responsible.

"I believe the selling job should start

here," Alkateeb said.

Meanwhile, Soronen asked Williams and Sever to "put it on paper" — detailing the proposed committee's organization and purpose.

But Dudley also took exception to aligning Sever's name with the proposed committee because of his intention to seek appointment to the City Council when former Mayor Fred Hughes officially resigns later this month. If Councilman Sever to lead the committee, Dudley said, the issue should be postponed until after a council appointment is made.

"I like the idea of having citizen input. But without the middleman," Dudley said, stressing the council's need to directly inform residents.

memory lane

Memories, memories, have we got memories. And we'd like to share them with you. Using local newspaper files, we're distilling a generous dose of life in the Farmington community from 40, 30, 20 and 10 years ago.

JAN. 13, 1944 —

"SECRETS?" asked the Around the Block column. "You're doggoned right they're secret. Lately we've heard so many rumors concerning military information that we'd like to remind you that if you know anything which might be of any value to our enemies, it is a secret to be closely guarded and not to be told — not even in whispers to your best friend. It is a secret to be locked in oneself."

ANOTHER AROUND the Block item noted: "Mighty fine was the verdict the City committee passed on the oyster stew they enjoyed as guests of the Auxiliary Police down at the Legion Hall Wednesday night. 'Twas a dish to be relished!'"

RUTH BACON, former music instructor for the Farmington Public Schools, recently graduated from the American Red Cross orientation school in Washington, D.C. Soon she will begin her new duties as assistant field director at the Coffeyville Airfield, Coffeyville, Kan.

SHORT ITEM: "More than half the flowers of the world are some shade of red." Another short item: "Sweet potato meal, made by dehydrating sweet potatoes, has been found to be about 3 per cent more efficient than cracked shelled corn in feeding steers."

CLASSIFIED AD: "WANTED — Girl to help with housework, need not know how to cook. Hours, 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. 19530 GHI Rd. Call 903."

JAN. 14, 1954 —

"WE'VE WAITED a long time," said an editorial, "for a firm and resolute policy regarding persons convicted of conspiring to overthrow the government by force or violence. Last week it came in President Eisenhower's State of the Union message."

"The President privileges that such persons be denied the rights and privileges of American citizenship. As we have stated before, citizenship is not something that is handed to us on a silver platter. . . . It must be earned through recognition and responsibility. Those who destroy it also destroy their rights as Americans."

SHORT ITEM: "Lola, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Douglas of Shadydale Ave., had her tonsils removed Monday."

FARMINGTON Township is undergoing the largest building boom in its history, according to officials. During 1953, some 644 building permits were issued in the township for all types of building. Of

that total, 408 were for new homes. The estimated value of all new construction in the township in 1953 was listed at \$5,763,427.

STATE POLICE were investigating a breaking and entering at Murrill's Lunch, 30400 Grand River, sometime during the night of Jan. 7. The intruder or intruders took 16 cartons of cigarettes and an undetermined amount of money from the juke box and pinball machines.

JAN. 9, 1964 —

SWEARING IN ceremonies for two new municipal judges — Judge-elect Sylvester Phenev and Associate Judge-elect Michael Hand — were conducted by Farmington city clerk Trena Quinn in the Farmington City Hall Dec. 30. Many local dignitaries were on hand to witness the occasion.

THE FARMINGTON City Council unanimously denied a request for rezoning a 10-acre parcel of land east of Farmington Road and south of Nine Mile Road. The rezoning had been requested so that a 156-unit apartment complex could be constructed.

DICK COOK, a Michigan State University sophomore from Farmington, was billed by MSU wrestling coach Grady Peninger as a promising new comer to the varsity squad. The 137-pound Cook was an outstanding wrestler during his high school days at Farmington.

SHORT ITEM: "Bureaucrats and crabs have a lot in common. Give either an inch and they'll take a yard." Another short item: "In 1952, an act of the Legislature authorized the building of a bridge between the Upper and Lower Peninsulas." Yet another short: "Advertising, like marriage, may not be the answer, but is there a better way?"

JAN. 11, 1974 —

AN ELECTION on renewing millage affecting about \$1.9 million of the Farmington School District's revenue is coming up this spring, but the school board was unable to decide exactly when at a recent meeting. After about an hour of debate, the board voted to direct the administration to reserve a date "sometime in April" for the election.

CLARENCEVILLE's basketball team snapped its losing string at 13 with a 60-53 victory over Brighton. Brian Luka keyed the Trojan victory with 21 points.

IN ANOTHER high school basketball game, Farmington Harrison dropped a 84-47 decision to Highland Park. Bob Mason scored 15 points for coach Bob Sutter's Harrison team.

A FREE MEDICAL clinic for Farmington-area young people will open its doors as soon as a suitable location can be found. The Farmington Area Advisory Committee (FAAC) sponsored the clinic.

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