

The Fishin' is Sweet at Oak Creek!



Trouble with Ethanol Will New Regulations Mean More Costly Problems for Boaters?

Ethanol fuel attracts water, and this sometimes separates from the combustible portion of the fuel, creating a mix that will cause serious problems in internal combustion engines.

Unless you haven't put fuel in your car in the past ten years, you're probably familiar with the term E10. It refers to the 10 percent ethanol that is blended into the gasoline you buy at the pump. If you've owned an outboard-powered boat during that same time period, you are far more familiar with E10 than your over-the-road counterparts.

The introduction of ethanol into the U.S. gasoline supply was the result of an EPA regulation called the Renewable Fuel Standard, and it caused a lot of costly headaches for boaters at the 10 percent level. Now, the EPA is doubling down under intense pressure from the agri-industry's ethanol lobby in Washington, increasing the mandated amount of ethanol in gasoline to 15 percent, a move dreaded by boaters and marine engine manufacturers alike.

Ethanol is derived from plant sources, mostly corn, and the government mandate has been a major boon to farmers and refiners. Basically, it is a fermented and refined grain alcohol that is denatured and then blended with gasoline. It initially found its way into the nation's fuel supply as a replacement for a chemical additive called MTBE, which was used to increase octane and reduce emissions. After years of use, the EPA determined that MTBE was harmful to the environment, and the hunt for a replacement began. Domestically manufactured ethanol replaced MTBE, and was also promoted as a way to reduce the nation's dependency on foreign oil. However, the use of ethanol in fuel came with a host of problems for marine engines and fuel systems.

At the fuel pump, it's critical never to use E15 in a boat engine, and manufacturers say



even E10 can be harmful if precautions are not taken.

Not long after the introduction of E10 gasoline, boats using it began experiencing problems. Almost immediately mysterious substances began clogging fuel filters that were later identified as a byproduct of mixing fuel still in the tank containing MTBE with ethanol-blended gasoline, but that was only a harbinger of things to come. Fuel lines approved for gasoline engines on boats reacted badly with the ethanol additive and started breaking down causing clogged filters; and in cases where the problem was not identified quickly, possible fuel leaks were the result. Any sludge deposits in older fuel tanks began dissolving and were pumped into the fuel system, damaging components



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