

## MEMBER OPINION:

# GETTING THE LEAD OUT Advocacy vs. Apathy

By Jim Herd, Minden, Nevada



The imminent potential loss of the practical use of your aircraft, due to the loss of 100LL, is an issue of immediate personal concern. No longer can we all just bury our heads in the sand and hope this goes away – it won't!

Despite the fact that avgas is less than one percent of the car gas market, and despite the fact that 30 percent of the piston GA fleet cannot operate satisfactorily on anything commonly available besides 100LL, the drive to eliminate 100LL in the near term is relentless and growing, like a rolling snowball! In the background we have GAMI, Swift Fuel, engine companies and others working hard to solve our problem for us. But in the forefront we have government officials advancing final and immediate measures, pandering to extremists who want lead gone now, regardless of the consequences. Let's face it,

anyone standing against such "progress" is instantly seen as insensitive to the needs of our planet.

ABS members may have more to lose here than almost any other group, and it is simply unrealistic to expect other advocacy groups to shoulder the load in our best interests.

Despite widespread apparent harmony amongst aviation folks on this issue, there will inevitably be significant differences in matters of specificity. For example, the commercial companies involved have a primary interest in their own survival and returning maximum profit to their shareholders – this is natural and proper, but possibly divergent from the best interests of ABS members. And the large aviation advocacy clubs have many complex dynamics driving their policy positions. In short order we must raise our game and become much more powerful advocates for a more com-

mon-sense approach to a serious threat to our immediate interests. No-one else can or will do so.

## A call to action

So, with some trepidation, may I call all ABS members to action? We must understand that the only way to win in national politics these days is to become the loudest squeaky wheel. *We all need to become educated, vocal, and active.* We should rally around the ABS leadership with extensive sharing of information and ideas leading to policy positions and aggressive action.

May I specifically urge ABS members with a strong background in politics or executive strategies to step forward? I believe this war will not be won by science, engineers, facts, and rational ideas alone. We need to construct our case so it will resonate with our political adversaries and the public at large.

I am not urging you to be selfish or insensitive to our environment; quite the contrary. But the world will not end if we take ten years to work through this instead of two, and the more the industry does research the better will be the eventual outcome for us. Unintended negative consequences abound, and they must all be understood and avoided. At its simplest, *we must be an opposing force of common sense to resist the knee-jerk solutions being foisted by some loud extremists.*

## What action?

First, there is a huge hill to climb to increase awareness of the dynamics of General Aviation and how they differ so greatly from the auto world. With autos, a progressive and incremental transition away from leaded fuels was very successful decades ago because the car/fuel

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volume supported multiple fuels simultaneously, and because cars have a much shorter life-span and far less rigorous technical requirements. In effect, the auto transition was a generational shift with relatively modest negative impact as leaded cars died away naturally.

Folks outside aviation, and especially environmental advocates, must be helped to realize that *any change in aviation fuel must be virtually an overnight change that will work for the entire fleet, not incremental over many years.* The existing fleet will take more than 50 years to die away! The dislocation effects will be huge and most reasonable citizens will not want to destroy the societal benefits of piston aviation—assuming they understand! So ABS members can greatly help by lobbying the EPA, FAA, and their neighbors whenever the chance arises.

There are also many “special cases” that must be raised in the consciousness of all stakeholders. Alaska has been identified as one such special case where the hardship on the entire State would be massive and not practical nor bearable if 100LL was removed “overnight.” *I’m sure ABS members can cite other case studies that serve to graphical-*

*ly illustrate our collective plight.* Please raise such examples to the ABS leadership so they can cite them in the official dialog. We must place a human face on the hardship that could come down. *We must unfrock the widely-held belief that our planes are “luxury toys for rich boys” who will feel no pain if they get whacked by the removal of lead.*

Study the EPA’s game plan at <http://www.epa.gov/nonroad/aviation/420f10013.htm>. I know that ABS is involved in this exercise, but I also know the power of numbers in every political arena. *Each ABS member should be personally offering thoughtful comments to the EPA, after getting educated.* Note that the EPA claims that about half of the airborne lead pollution in America comes from our planes! I suspect there are two sides to this story.

The correct solution to all of this will involve several more years of research – not just all the technical stuff, but also an exhaustive search to uncover and understand all the unintended secondary consequences that are all too familiar in our complex modern world. The correct solution may not be one solution, and it won’t be a sensational overnight flick of a switch.

The circumstances of our planes, their missions, and their owners are so diverse that it is unlikely that one size will fit all. Besides, our Society is almost always better served when its citizens have attractive choices available to them. We must fight for those choices to exist and be practical, otherwise we are likely to get the proverbial “one size fits all.” And it won’t! Bottom line: Our destiny is in our hands.

Jim Herd is a mechanical/industrial engineer and a retired Silicon Valley executive with experience in general management, business strategic planning, and high tech start-ups. He flies a turbocharged 1998 A36.





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