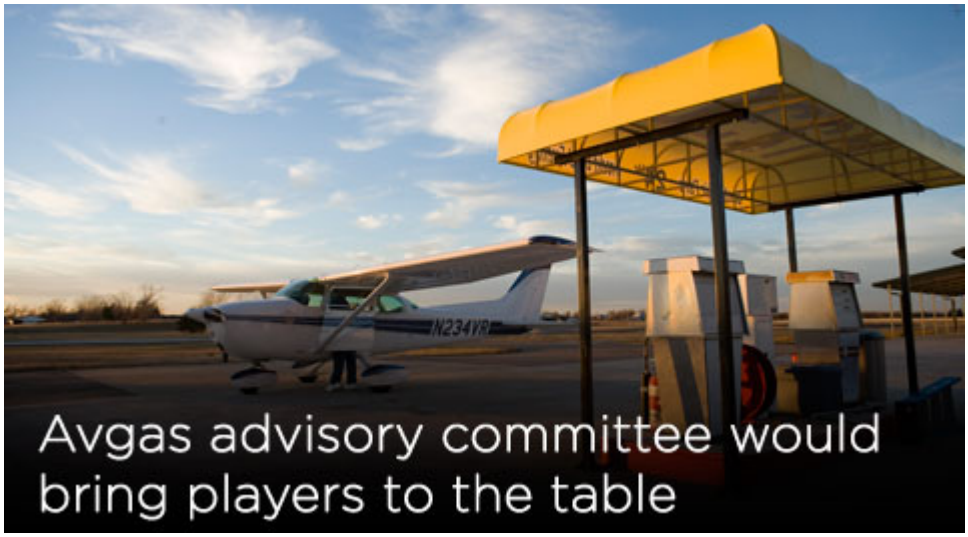
Comment extension grants time to act on avgas

Advisory committee would bring players to the table

By AOPA ePublishing staff



The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has granted a 60-day extension to the comment period for its advance notice of proposed rulemaking on lead emissions from piston aircraft.

The extension, requested by a coalition of avgas stakeholders, allows the group more time to gather data that will help it develop the criteria for evaluating fuels and a plan for easing the pain of transition; the groups had requested 120 days to evaluate new information that will not be available until early fall. The coalition is putting the extra time to good use: In just the past week, member organizations have met with type clubs representing aircraft with high-compression engines, called on the FAA to take a leadership role in the transition, reached out to key members of Congress on Capitol Hill, and briefed industry reporters on the many challenges ahead.

The industry groups that have banded together to confront the issue met with the office of the FAA Administrator June 23 to discuss the need to form a public-private partnership/structure to work on the issue.

“The general aviation community and petroleum industry together must move toward a future without lead in fuel,” said AOPA President Craig Fuller. “Right now there is no known solution, so we need to establish a process that considers all factors. To facilitate that, we need leadership from the FAA. We have a long road ahead of us, but I’m confident we can find a solution.”

AOPA, the American Petroleum Institute (API), the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA), the National Air Transportation Association (NATA), the National Business Aviation Association (NBAA), the General Aviation Manufacturers Association (GAMA) and the National Petrochemical and Refiners Association (NPRA) formed the coalition to work with industry, the FAA, and the EPA to address the challenges of finding a 100LL replacement; CEOs and representatives of the groups met with a representative of the FAA administrator to discuss the coalition’s request for a public-private partnership/structure .

FAA leadership is needed to manage the many safety, technical, logistical, and economic issues to ensure the best possible outcome for GA and fuel providers, the groups told the FAA. The FAA is responsible for the approval and certification of the products that use the fuel, so it is the agency in the best position to manage industry efforts, they added.

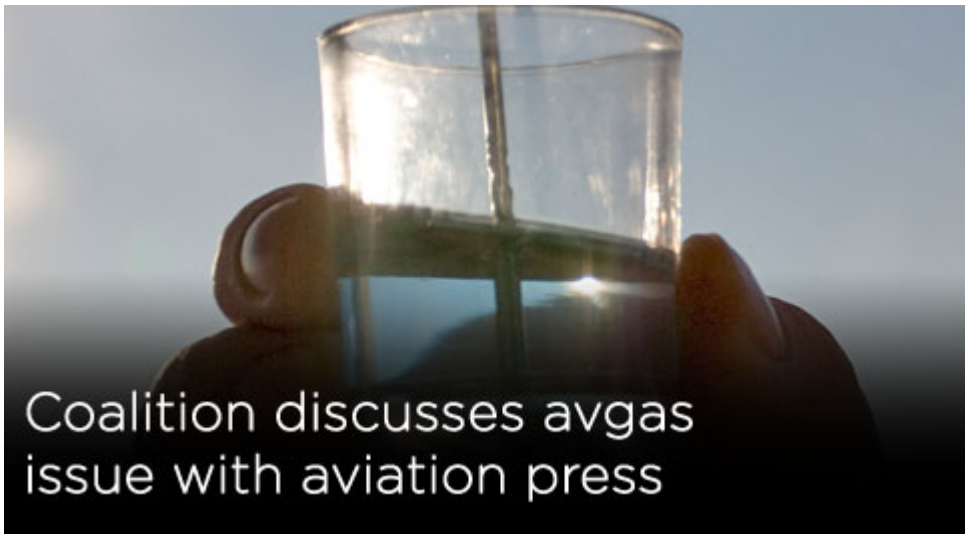
An FAA-led public-private group would also provide a forum for discussion that includes input from producers, handlers, and users of avgas.

“We can find a solution that works for all of piston-powered general aviation if we have all the stakeholders around the table,” said AOPA President Craig Fuller. “It’s an industry-wide problem, and it has to be an industry-wide solution.”

June 24, 2010

Coalition discusses avgas issue with aviation press

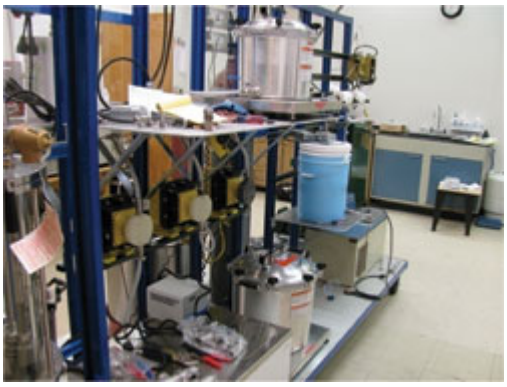
By AOPA ePublishing staff



If I put it in my gas tank, will my engine run? It's a natural first question for any pilot evaluating a potential 100LL replacement, and it's tempting to view it as the litmus test. But the future of avgas isn't so simple.

If it works in my engine, will it work in yours? An unleaded avgas must work across a wide spectrum of piston general aviation aircraft—a category that includes everything from J-3 Cubs to high-performance Bonanzas in climates as disparate as New Mexico and Alaska. It's possible that two fuel types could each work for half the GA piston fleet, but the market simply wouldn't be able to support them both. (All of piston-powered general aviation in America burns the amount of fuel in one year as the nation's automobiles burn in one day.) The GA industry needs a comprehensive solution that will take into account the comments of all types of GA users and will address concerns about octane as well as cost, availability, ease of production, and environmental impact.

The coalition of avgas stakeholders laid out the complexities of the avgas issue—and the steps the group has taken to address them—in a Webinar briefing with the aviation press June 24.



"It's easy to look at the issue of finding an unleaded fuel too narrowly—as only an octane issue, for instance," said AOPA Vice President of Regulatory Affairs Rob Hackman. "We need to address all of the challenges of an unleaded future, and briefings like this help us communicate what we're doing and how we're going to get there together."

The coalition has identified several areas in which a fuel must pass muster in order for a fuel to be considered viable: safety and performance, aircraft and materials compatibility, environmental and health factors, fuel production and distribution, and cost impact. The group outlined its plans for the next decade or so in the Future Avgas Strategy and Transition Plan (FAST). The industry aims to reduce lead emissions in the near term while laying the foundation for the transition to unleaded fuel.

Reducing lead emissions now will help the industry meet air quality standards while identifying criteria for a viable unleaded gas. Those criteria will help the industry develop specifications for a fuel and allow new aircraft to be certified for unleaded fuel before the EPA and FAA regulate the transition for all aircraft.

June 24, 2010

AOPA, GAMA talk with type clubs about avgas solutions

By AOPA Communications staff

Now is the time to be looking at all avgas alternatives—not ruling any out—AOPA and the General Aviation Manufacturers Association explained to a coalition of type clubs representing aircraft with high-compression engines during a meeting in Dayton, Ohio, on June 19.

AOPA President Craig Fuller, along with Rob Hackman, AOPA vice president of regulatory affairs, and Walter Desrosier, GAMA vice president of engineering and maintenance, met with the owners' groups to discuss the issue.

Prompted by the anticipated Environmental Protection Agency mandate to reduce or remove lead from aviation gasoline, the type clubs, including American Bonanza Society, the Cirrus Owners and Pilots Association, the Malibu/Mirage Owners and Pilots Association, the Mooney Aircraft Pilots Association, and the Twin Cessna Flyers, are worried about a possible transition to a lower octane fuel replacement that could reduce their aircraft engines' performance.

However, AOPA and GAMA pointed out that focusing on a single piece of the puzzle—octane—may not allow for the identification of the best possible and most viable alternative to 100LL and could leave them with a solution that is prohibitively expensive, worse for the environment than lead, or both.

"We had a comprehensive discussion on avgas related issues," said Fuller. "And we agreed to work closely in the months and years ahead as an alternative is sought for today's leaded fuel.

"I am encouraged that the type organizations are so focused on this issue," he added. "Their full engagement is very important."

Hackman and Desrosier are technical representatives to a broad coalition of aviation and petroleum industry groups that also includes the American Petroleum Institute (API), the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA), the National Air Transportation Association (NATA), the National Business Aviation Association (NBAA), and the National Petrochemical and Refiners Association (NPRA) who are committed to working with the broad GA industry, FAA, and EPA to help achieve significant reductions in lead emissions from GA aircraft along a transition timeline which balances environmental benefit with aviation safety, technical feasibility, and economic impact upon the GA industry.

During a detailed four-hour briefing, Hackman and Desrosier recapped the thus-far unsuccessful 20-year effort to find a simple drop-in replacement for 100LL and tetra ethyl lead in avgas and outlined the numerous technical, safety, economic, environmental, and performance challenges to identifying, vetting, and introducing a viable alternative.

June 21, 2010