

DEQ applauds EPA decision on benzene

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

State officials breathe sigh of relief over revisions to EPA rule to limit benzene from oil refineries and automobiles

Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) Air Quality experts are applauding the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) decision last Friday to institute a nationwide cap on the amount of benzene in gasoline that will reduce benzene levels in the Northwest threefold. The EPA had previously proposed a rule that could have left levels in the Northwest higher than other parts of the country.

In response to concerns expressed by Oregon and Washington environmental experts, Senator Ron Wyden and several public interest groups, EPA has established a benzene cap on each refinery in the country. To meet the new standard, most Northwest refiners will be required to install emission control equipment to reduce benzene. These controls must be in place by 2012, and will result in benzene levels in Northwest gasoline that are comparable to other parts of the US. "The new standard will cut health risks to Oregonians from benzene in half, but there is more work to be done to meet health goals set by the Environmental Quality Commission," said Andy Ginsburg, DEQ's Air Quality Division Administrator.

In the Northwest, this means that benzene in gas will be reduced approximately 70% by 2012. The Northwest will see the largest reduction in total percent of benzene fuel content of anywhere in the country for less than a cent a gallon. EPA's action greatly reduces the geographic variability of benzene content in fuel across the county and holds the entire country to a tougher, more protective standard.

"We have a lot of people to thank for getting this revision approved," said DEQ Director, Stephanie Hallock. "Oregonians should be grateful to both the Oregon and Washington congressional delegations, led by Senator Ron Wyden and Representative Earl Blumenauer. Governor Ted Kulongoski and Oregon Legislators, especially Senator Brad Avakian and Representative Jackie Dingfelder, and local elected officials through Metro also helped the cause immensely. The Oregonian and the Eugene Register Guard are to be credited for the work they did to bring the issue to light. Finally, we appreciate EPA for listening to the people of the Northwest to better protect public health and the air we breathe."

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