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ODA to Test Biodiesel Quality in Portland

Article by Libby Tucker, *Daily Journal of Commerce*

The Oregon Department of Agriculture in August will begin testing biodiesel sold within the Portland city limits to ensure the fuel meets quality standards. Dirty biodiesel can clog fuel filters and cause engines to run inefficiently. "It is a huge concern for the (fuel) industry right now," Rick Wallace, senior energy analyst for the Oregon Department of Energy, said. "They want to make sure they're getting good product out there." Portland City Council on Wednesday agreed to grant as much as \$140,000 to the ODA's Measurement Standards Division to hire a new staff member and to pay for other costs associated with the testing. The division will test fuel at every step along the path to consumers: biodiesel production, fuel truck delivery and the gas station pump. The tests also will ensure gas station compliance with the city's biofuels mandate, which will require all diesel fuel sold in Portland to contain at least 5 percent biodiesel and all gasoline sold to contain 10 percent ethanol, starting Aug. 15. The ODA will visit all gas stations in Portland three times each year for testing. "It's important to make sure the playing field is level for retailers and distributors in the marketplace," Ty Kovatch, chief of staff for Portland Commissioner Randy Leonard, said. "Most of them will dutifully follow the law, but there will be some that will try to skirt the rules and this initiative will make sure they're identified." The city will cover enforcement. Retailers, distributors and producers that don't meet the city's regulations will face fines of up to \$10,000 for each violation. State standards still uncertain Oregon law requires all fuel sold in the state to meet ASTM International standards for quality, which help ensure engines will run properly when burning the fuel. The Measurement Standards Division already oversees fuel testing and quality assurance for petroleum based fuels in Oregon. "The city in its wisdom will defer to the state," Robert Grott, executive director of the Northwest Environmental Business Council, said. "It's supporting the state in being the lead on quality issues instead of the city trying to step into that very complicated and expensive process. Biodiesel blends, which include a percent of biodiesel mixed with petroleum diesel, are a new product on the market. As a result, the state isn't yet sure how to test them, Clark Cooney, assistant administrator in the state Measurement Standards Division, said. ASTM has set standards for B100 but has not yet set standards for biodiesel blends, he said. Quality testing for the city of Portland's biofuels mandate will help the Oregon Department of Agriculture to prepare for the statewide renewable fuels mandate, which takes effect when certain in-state biofuels production goals are met. The new state law will require all diesel fuel sold in the state to contain at least 2 percent biodiesel and all gasoline to contain 10 percent ethanol. "We're impacting what's going to go statewide from the get-go," Cooney said. To help with testing, the ODA in June awarded Vancouver, Wash.-based laboratory **FuelOnly** a two-year contract to test all diesel fuel, including biodiesel sold in Oregon, to ensure it meets ASTM standards. The agency will pull a liter sample of fuel and sends it to **FuelOnly** for testing. The laboratory will check the glycerin level, flash point, carbon residue, corrosiveness, acidity, viscosity and additive levels including calcium, potassium and phosphorous, to ensure quality. "With diesel fuel, if you go to a pump you're guaranteed you're getting a good product," Steve Wicklander, general manager of **FuelOnly**, said. "Biodiesel is a whole new ballgame, so you want to keep an eye on things and make sure to check everything." Too much glycerin, the fatty part of used cooking oils, causes the most problems for engines, Wicklander said. If a producer doesn't properly wash the biodiesel during production, too much glycerin remains. "(Glycerin) can plug things up," the DOE's Wallace said. "It's gooey stuff you don't want in the fuel."