

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6025

As Passed Senate, March 12, 2001

Title: An act relating to the use of gasoline additives.

Brief Description: Prohibiting methyl tertiary-butyl ether as a gasoline additive.

Sponsors: Senators Eide, Patterson, Franklin, Fairley, Kline, Regala, Fraser, Thibaudeau, Spanel and Honeyford.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Environment, Energy & Water: 2/20/01, 2/22/01 [DP].
Passed Senate: 3/12/01, 48-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY & WATER

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Fraser, Chair; Regala, Vice Chair; Eide, Hale, Honeyford, Jacobsen, McDonald and Morton.

Staff: Richard Rodger (786-7461)

Background: Methyl tertiary-butyl ether (MTBE) is a volatile oxygen-containing organic compound that is added to gasoline to promote more complete combustion, reduce air pollution, and increases octane ratings. Large scale, national use of the product was started in 1995 with the introduction of reformulated gasoline containing 11-15 percent MTBE by volume.

MTBE is difficult to bio-degrade, readily dissolves in water, and moves through soil and groundwater rapidly. The EPA has tentatively listed MTBE as a possible human carcinogen based upon experiments on animals.

MTBE was used as an oxygenate in approximate 700,000 gallons of gasoline, in the city of Spokane during 1994-95, to assist in reducing air pollution. The main use of MTBE in Washington has been as an octane booster.

Last fall the Department of Ecology (DOE) conducted a study of existing underground storage clean-up sites. The study revealed that nearly 50 percent had some contamination relating to the use of MTBE. Twenty-five percent of the sites exceeded the EPA's national drinking water advisory standard (20 parts per billion). The DOE estimates that there may be more than 800 point sources of MTBE contamination resulting from known leaking underground storage tanks. MTBE has not been detected in any drinking water wells in Washington State.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has begun the process to eliminate MTBE as a fuel oxygenate. The state of California has adopted a ban of MTBE as a gasoline additive, effective December 31, 2002.

Summary of Bill: After December 31, 2003, the intentional addition of MTBE to gasoline, motor fuel, or clean fuel for sale or use is prohibited. MTBE may in no event be present in gasoline above six-tenths of 1 percent by volume.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: MTBE is difficult to bio-degrade and moves through soil and groundwater rapidly. The EPA has tentatively listed MTBE as a possible human carcinogen. MTBE was used in Spokane one winter to oxygenate the gasoline in order to reduce air pollution. It has been used as a gasoline octane booster. The Department of Agriculture collects and coordinates the analysis of the contents of gasoline in the state. The state of California has adopted a ban of MTBE as a gasoline additive, effective December 31, 2002, and imposed a limit on the percentage of the product that may be used in gasoline until that date.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Leslie Emerich, Department of Agriculture; Jim Pendowski, Department of Ecology (pro).