



News Release

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NEW E15 GASOLINE MAY DAMAGE VEHICLE AND CAUSE CONSUMER CONFUSION

AAA research reveals need for regulators and industry to suspend E15 sales to protect motorists

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. (Nov. 30, 2012) – A recent survey by AAA finds a strong likelihood of consumer confusion and the potential for voided warranties and vehicle damage as a result of the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) recent approval of E15 gasoline. An overwhelming 95 percent of consumers surveyed have not heard of E15, a newly approved gasoline blend that contains up to 15 percent ethanol. With little consumer knowledge about E15 and less than five percent of cars on the road approved by automakers to use the fuel, AAA is urging regulators and the industry to stop the sale of E15 until motorists are better protected.

Only about 12 million out of the more than 240 million light-duty vehicles on the roads today are approved by manufacturers to use E15 gasoline, based on a survey conducted by AAA of auto manufacturers. AAA automotive engineering experts also have reviewed the available research and believe that sustained use of E15 in both newer and older vehicles could result in significant problems such as accelerated engine wear and failure, fuel-system damage and false “check engine” lights for any vehicle not approved by its manufacturer to use E15.

“It is clear that millions of Americans are unfamiliar with E15, which means there is a strong possibility that many motorists may improperly fill up using this gasoline and damage their vehicle,” said Georjeane Blumling, Vice President of Public Relations for AAA Tidewater Virginia. “Bringing E15 to the market without adequate safeguards does not responsibly meet the needs of consumers.”

Unsuspecting consumers using E15 could end up with engine problems that might not be covered by their vehicles’ warranties. Five manufacturers (BMW, Chrysler, Nissan, Toyota and Volkswagen) are on record saying their warranties will not cover fuel-related claims caused by the use of E15. Seven additional automakers (Ford, Honda, Hyundai, Kia, Mazda, Mercedes-Benz and Volvo) have stated that the use of E15 does not comply with the fuel requirements specified in their owner’s manuals and may void warranty coverage.

The only vehicles currently approved by automakers to use E15 are flex-fuel models, 2001 model-year and newer Porsches, 2012 model-year and newer GM vehicles and 2013 model-year Ford vehicles. These approvals extend only to cars, light-duty trucks and medium-duty passenger vehicles (SUVs). The use of E15 is expressly prohibited in heavy-duty vehicles, boats, motorcycles, power equipment, lawn mowers and off-road vehicles.

“The sale and use of E15 should be suspended until additional gas pump labeling and consumer education efforts are implemented to mitigate problems for motorists and their vehicles,” continued Blumling. “Consumers should carefully read pump labels and know their auto manufacturer’s recommendations to help prevent any problems from E15.”

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AAA urges fuel producers and regulators to do a better job of educating consumers about potential dangers before selling E15 gasoline. This outreach should include a consumer education campaign and more effective pump labels, among other potential safeguards to protect consumers and their vehicles. AAA also recommends additional testing to conclusively determine the impact of E15 use on vehicle engines and fuel system components. At least ten gas stations currently sell E15 and that number is expected to grow, which means now is the time to suspend sales before more retailers begin offering the fuel.

The EPA in June officially approved the sale of E15 after receiving a waiver request from producers interested in expanding the use of corn-based ethanol. Despite objections by auto manufacturers, the EPA approved the use of E15 gasoline in flex-fuel vehicles and 2001 model year and newer cars, light-duty trucks and medium-duty passenger vehicles and SUVs. AAA urges consumers to follow the recommendations of manufacturers to truly protect themselves from voided warranties or potential damage.

AAA supports the development and use of alternative fuels. More than 95 percent of the gasoline sold in the United States contains up to 10 percent ethanol. Lower ethanol blends should remain available to consumers while the challenges with E15 are addressed.

The survey findings related to consumer knowledge of E15 are from a telephone survey conducted among a national probability sample of 1,012 adults comprising 504 men and 508 women 18 years of age and older, living in private households in the continental United States.

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