

Waterloo PUBLIC OPINION

Vol. 120 No. 258

Serving the Glacial Lakes Region of South Dakota and Minnesota since 1887

Price: 50 cents

www.thepublicopinion.com

Ethanol blender pumps shut down

By TERRY O'KEEFE
Public Opinion Staff Writer

A few short months after they were started up, ethanol gasoline blender pumps in Watertown have been shut off.

While gasoline with 10 percent ethanol is common at gas stations and convenience stores across the country and 85 percent ethanol E85 is becoming more and more common, pumps were installed at Sioux Valley Co-op in Watertown last summer that let drivers pump gasoline blended with 20 or 30 percent ethanol.

Gary French, general manager at Sioux Valley Co-op, said Friday the Co-op's Store on Highway 212 would no longer offer the 20

and 30-percent blends that came with the installation of the new pumps this past summer.

"The higher blends of ethanol gas were pulled over concerns the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will issue a ruling they do not conform to Clean Air Act requirements for burning gasoline in vehicles that are not designed to run the purer versions of ethanol.

An official ruling could come this week.

"We just decided with everything we'd been told about it, we should just suspend sales," French said Friday afternoon. "We're just trying to sort this all out."

French said his fuel supplier raised the question of possible problems a couple of weeks ago.

"The issue seems to be that EPA and auto manufacturers don't recognize those other blends as acceptable for motor vehicle use," French said. "If that is the case, we'll have to discontinue offering those blends until new regulations come out."

Dawna Leitze, executive director of the S.D. Petroleum Marketers Association, said she has been communicating with EPA over the issue and has submitted a formal request for a ruling.

"I expect to hear possibly as soon as (this) week," Leitze said Friday.

She said she is confident EPA will find in favor of using the 20- and 30-percent blends.

Newer vehicles designed to burn higher grade ethanol at 85 percent, or flex-fuel vehicles, have no problem with any of the other blends as well. The questions arise when vehicles that are not of that design run on gas with more than a 10-percent blend of ethanol.

"They've (the higher blends) been real popular," French said. "People have liked the blender pumps. They're customer friendly user-friendly."

"I've had no complaints about (the blends)."

French said the blender pumps that also offer E85 are all marked

for use in flex-fuel vehicles, but others are using the blends as well and some use what is known as "splash" blending to mix ethanol and regular gasoline up to half-and-half.

"We know people without flex-fuel vehicles are also using it," he said. "And people also mix their own without the blender pumps."

That will likely continue, but until EPA issues a formal ruling, the blender pumps will not be available to drivers in Watertown.

"We just thought it was in our best interest," French said. "Hopefully, things will straighten out and we can offer those blends again."