

OPENING STATEMENT

The Honorable Andy Harris (R-MD), Chairman

Subcommittee on Energy and Environment

Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Hitting the Ethanol Blend Wall: Examining the Science on E15

July 7, 2011

I thank our witnesses for being here today to testify on the scientific and technical issues associated with the Environmental Protection Agency's decision to grant a partial waiver for the use of fuel blends containing up to 15 percent ethanol, known as "E15."

At the outset, I'd like to make clear that this hearing is not about picking winners and losers among fuels, or whether ethanol production is inherently good or bad. This hearing will focus specifically on the question: Did EPA use the best available science when granting a partial waiver for the use of E15, and if not, what issues remain unanswered and what are the potential impacts on the hundreds of millions of engines that will consume E15 fuel in the very near future?

Due to this technical focus, we have invited witnesses that will be directly impacted by this decision to testify on the scientific and data quality issues related to mid-level ethanol blends.

While the details associated with the EPA E15 decisions are complex and esoteric, their impacts are potentially massive. The properties of ethanol are very different from gasoline, and they may result in problems associated with corrosion, engine failure, increased emissions, materials incompatibility, infrastructure, warranty coverage, and the potential for misfueling.

Every American that uses a car, boat, motorcycle, tractor, lawnmower or other gasoline-powered equipment could be negatively affected. As we will hear today, a diverse coalition of interest groups have highlighted the need for greater scientific certainty and more testing for E15. And thanks to the efforts of Vice-Chairman Sensenbrenner, we now have most automakers on record asserting that EPA testing failed to determine that E15 wouldn't be harmful to car engines, and that warranties would not cover any resulting damages.

Why, then, did EPA issue enormously impactful rulings largely on the basis of a single test program conducted by the Department of Energy? We are here today to answer this question, but based on available information it appears safe to say it was not a science-driven decision that comprehensively addresses the technical concerns identified by stakeholders.

Meanwhile, the EPA job-killing machine marches on, driven by a regulate-at-all-costs mentality and unencumbered by facts. From ethanol to climate regulations to agricultural policies, the experience in my District illustrates how EPA is strangling the economy, and more often than not it is doing so on the basis of weak science. Last month, a nearly-100-year-old poultry company,

Allen Family Foods, filed for bankruptcy. This company is a major employer on the Eastern Shore; It is the 2nd-largest employer in Talbot County, with more than 500 employees at a single plant in Cordova. The combination of skyrocketing feed prices driven by our ethanol policy and job-killing regulations by EPA has now forced this company to shutter its doors.

Last, I want to emphasize that E15 is not a partisan issue. In February, the House voted overwhelmingly in favor of an amendment that would have defunded EPA's implementation of the E15 waiver decision for this fiscal year. That language did not become law, and the issue clearly remains unresolved. I believe this Subcommittee can play an important role in advancing this debate, consistent with past efforts to examine the scientific and technical underpinnings of fuel formulations and vehicle and biofuels technologies more generally. To that end, we have asked witnesses to comment on very brief legislative language that would direct the EPA to contract with the National Academy of Sciences for an independent assessment of the state of the science regarding E15.

I look forward to receiving feedback on this preliminary language, and I want to thank the witnesses for appearing before us today.