**[Chicago adds to the E15 debacle](http://blog.tradeonlytoday.com/dealer_outlook/?p=2110" \t "_blank)**

Posted by Norm Schultz on July 22, 2014

In Chicago, it is said, dead people still vote. But until now, I didn’t realize Chicago could be the seat of brain-dead office holders.

Witness the latest proposed ordinance by five Chicago aldermen requiring that all self-service filling stations use equipment that dispenses E15. Believed to be the first major city to contemplate such a mandate, if it weren’t such a serious matter you’d have to laugh at their justification and wonder if they’re even on this planet.

According to city officials, ethanol bums cleaner than gasoline (wrong); is significantly less expensive than conventional gasoline (exaggerated) with expected savings between 5 and 15 cents per gallon; higher blends of ethanol reduce the greenhouse gas emissions (not true); and Illinois is the third largest ethanol-producing state in the nation with 14 ethanol plants that can crank out 1.5 billion gallons of ethanol per year. So what if E15 will destroy millions of marine and other small engines.

The fact that Chicago is even considering such a law only turns a spotlight on the importance of pushing Congress to end the mandate for ethanol in the nation’s broken Renewable Fuels Standard. The failure of Congress to act only raises more problems.

For example, last month the Missouri Corn Growers Association, attempting to capitalize on political unrest in Iraq, called for more corn ethanol (now there’s a surprise announcement), claiming it would lower gas prices. Seems like less concern for the nation’s gas consumers and more for protecting the 300 million gallons of ethanol produced annually in Missouri’s six farmer-owned ethanol plants? But that’s just me.

Far from the corn fields of mid-America, the seafood industry of Louisiana and neighboring Gulf of Mexico states is endangered by ethanol. A dead zone the size of Connecticut is now in the Gulf and it’s rapidly growing. The Gulf produces an estimated 40 percent of the shrimp, crabs and other seafood in the lower 48 states. The coastal economy is a stake. How does this happen hundreds of miles from the Corn Belt?

Passage of the fuel standard in 2007 triggered a rush to plant and cash in on skyrocketing prices for corn. Farms across the Midwest converted an additional 13.5 million acres to grow corn. But corn is a resource-intensive crop, meaning while corn was planted on 23 percent of U.S. cropland in 2009, it needed 40 percent of the fertilizer used across the nation. The result: a great increase in phosphorus-laden fertilizer run-off into the Mississippi River and, ultimately, into the Gulf of Mexico. The dead zone already spanned some 6,000 square miles last summer, where there’s no oxygen and nothing lives, according to Larry McKinney, executive director of the Harte Research Institute at Texas A&M.

Clearly, corn-based ethanol has not lived up to its expectations. But policymakers like those in Chicago still don’t get it. Ethanol is not good for the environment and does not improve either the country’s overall air quality or provide energy security. Even a federally-funded study indicates biofuels from corn plants are actually worse for global warming, releasing 7 percent more greenhouse gases compared to traditional gasoline.

One group that might finally be getting it is the U.S. House of Representatives. It’s been reported that a majority of House members agree there’s a problem with the fuel standard. These members have endorsed change to the federal corn-based ethanol mandate. Reps. Bob Goodlatte, R-Va., Jim Costa, D-Calif., Steve Womack, R-Ark., and Peter Welch, D-Vt. have sponsored legislation (H.R. 1462, the Renewable Fuel Standard Reform Act) to eliminate corn-based ethanol requirements from the standard. Truthfully, this majority agrees some sort of change to the ethanol mandate is needed but they don’t necessarily agree with completely eliminating it. That doesn’t exactly say enough, but it’s something.

Finally, the National Marine Manufacturers Association reports last week that during the House Committee on Appropriation’s Interior and Environment markup (directing Fiscal Year 2015 funding for EPA), an important amendment affecting the sale of E15 was unanimously adopted and will now be considered by the full House. The NMMA’s Washington office has been heavily involved in passing the amendment that the NMMA describes as requiring the EPA to do a more comprehensive E15 public education outreach on the dangers of E15 to non-approved engines, like boats, motorcycles, and lawn equipment.

It’s only one of several actions being undertaken by NMMA, as well as the Marine Retailers Association of the Americas, BoatUS and others, to end the ethanol debacle all together. For example, the NMMA is engaged in litigation against the EPA for its failure to establish a robust misfueling mitigation plan. MRAA and BoatUS continue to urge their members to pressure their lawmakers to cap ethanol at the current 10 percent, eliminate future mandated increases in ethanol and/or totally repeal the ethanol provisions in the fuel standard.

One thing’s for certain — all members of the marine industry and our customers must continue to be informed and engaged.