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E15'S POTENTIAL DANGERS

BY PHILLIP RUSSO

One of the most important regulatory issues that fleet managers are keeping an eye on is the movement towards E15. Just when fleets were getting used to E10, the Environmental



Protection Agency (EPA) began a push for an increase to 15 percent ethanol.

In 2010, EPA issued a partial waiver that allows for the use of E15 in vehicles manufactured during or after model year 2007. In 2011, EPA expanded authorized use of E15 to include model year 2001 and later vehicles.

In August, E15 moved one step closer to reality when the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit dismissed a challenge to the EPA's partial Clean Air Act waivers for mid-level ethanol blends. In its dismissal, the court said the plaintiffs did not have a legal right to challenge the EPA decision and that trade groups presented speculative and indirect claims of harm from approval of E15. Plaintiffs in the case included the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers and the Grocery Manufacturers Association.

Chief Judge David Sentelle wrote, for example, that engine manufacturers, "provided almost no support for their assertion that E15 'may' damage the engines they have sold, subjecting them to liability." Similarly, he wrote, the refiners said they would face additional expenses for handling E15 without showing there was no other way for them to meet U.S. targets for biofuel use. And food makers' desire for low corn prices has no footing in a statute about cars, he wrote.

Judge Brett Kavanaugh dissented and argued EPA was wrong in approving E15.

We here at NAFAs Fleet Management Association, an organization comprised of fleet managers from throughout North America, have been following this legislation closely, since many of our members are still dealing with problems from E10. The association currently sides with U.S. Congressman Jim Sensenbrenner, the vice chair of the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology, who has been advocating for more time to test the fuel to see whether or not a move to E15 will affect vehicles.

In an interview with NAFAs *FLEETSolutions* magazine, Sensenbrenner said, "The EPA relied on a single Department of Energy study that was never intended to be comprehensive

and ignored significant contrary evidence. Concerns abound that E15 will cause damage to car and truck engines and also will be devastating when accidentally used in a boat motor or small engine."

Many vehicles currently on the road, and in use by businesses, were simply not made to operate on gasoline higher than E10. In June 2011, Sensenbrenner sent letters to 14 U.S. automakers to investigate how E15 would affect vehicles. All 14 automakers expressed strong concerns that cars and trucks (including those made after 2001) would wear down quicker from E15. In addition, the automakers expressed concerns about premature engine failures and other damages that



would be an added expense for businesses. Even more added expenses would arise from voided warranties and lower fuel efficiency.

Businesses with trucks should be concerned about the potential impact for both light-duty engines as well as non-covered engines.

In a statement issued after the ruling on Aug. 17, Congressman Ralph Hall, the chairman of the House Committee, said, "The majority opinion appears to ignore the near-universal agreement among automakers and engine manufacturers that these waivers will result in damaged engines and voided warranties."

"NAFA's concern is another example of the potential fallout from using E15 before we know how it impacts vehicles," said Sensenbrenner. "If E15 is widely available in the marketplace, American drivers who use the fuel will be faced with premature engine damage and more trips to the auto repair shop. In the case of the fleet management industry, those costs will only be compounded—I imagine some companies would be faced with hundreds of thousands of dollars in additional maintenance costs, not to mention more trips to fuel up due to lower fuel efficiency. Of course, because the fuel also voids warranties, fleet managers would have no other recourse but to pay for those repairs completely out of pocket."

This issue now moves back to Congress, which could block EPA's approval of E15, but frankly that is not likely to happen with the few legislative days that remain in the 2012 session of Congress.

Russo is the executive director of NAFAs Fleet Management Association. For more information, visit www.nafa.org.

DASHBOARD



ValleyCrest's safest employees win trucks

ValleyCrest Landscape Cos., Calabasas, Calif., celebrated its 2012 National Safety Awareness Day by presenting new work trucks to four of its safest employees. It was the featured part of safety events the company held across the country, where more than 10,000 employees gathered to recognize superior performance in workplace safety.

"ValleyCrest's commitment to safety began when the company was founded more than 63 years ago. To this day, ensuring employees go home safe every night remains our top priority," says Roger Zino, ceo of ValleyCrest.

That's a demanding task that requires diligence and attention to details every day. In a typical day, ValleyCrest crews are out on the road in more than 4,400 trucks, pulling more than 2,500 trailers to thousands of cus-

tomers job sites where they'll operate some 9,000 pieces of equipment.

This year marks the 10th year that ValleyCrest has awarded new trucks, during which time 51 trucks have been given to workers. Since 2002, the company's overall claims (at-fault, auto liability claims and OSHA recordable workers compensation claims) have decreased 50 percent.

This year, a record 4,600 employees across four different U.S. safety regions were eligible to enter a drawing for a new truck. To qualify, full-time field employees must complete one year of service with no accidents and be employed by a branch that meets or exceeds the company's threshold safety standards.

The four new truck winners for 2012 include:



From left: Frank Esqueda, regional safety manager; Mike Scully, ValleyCrest regional manager; truck winner Angel Hernandez-Ayala, ValleyCrest gardener in Phoenix; and Dave Hanson, ValleyCrest senior vice president.

- Domingo Cruz Hernandez, a crew leader in the maintenance division in Palo Alto, Calif.,
- Angel Hernandez-Ayala, a gardener in the maintenance division in Phoenix,
- Amelia Lopez, a gardener in the maintenance division in Tampa, Fla.; and
- Jose M. Carrillo, a crew leader in the maintenance division in Delray Beach, Fla.

Know before you tow

Towing capability is an important consideration when choosing a truck for a Green Industry business. Here's a handy guide to towing lingo, courtesy of Ram Trucks' Ram Zone blog (blog.ramtrucks.com/ram-technology/know-your-tow/).

Gross Combined Vehicle Weight (GCWW) is the total combined weight of a fully loaded vehicle, including passengers, payload and everything in tow.

Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW) is the total weight of a fully loaded vehicle, including passengers and payload—but excluding all towing.

Gross Trailer Weight (GTW) is the total weight of the trailer plus all the cargo in it.

Curb Weight is the weight of a vehicle without any passengers or cargo, but including all necessary fuel, fluids and standard equipment.

Axle Ratio is the ratio between the revolutions per minute of the driveshaft and the rear axle. In general, a



higher number offers more towing power; a lower number offers better engine efficiency.

Trailer Tongue Weight is the downward force exerted on the hitch ball by the trailer coupler. In most cases, it should fall between 10 percent to 25 percent of GTW.

The **Hitch Assembly** is mounted to the tow vehicle (most often to the vehicle frame) and includes a hitch receiver, ball mount adapter, hitch ball and wiring harness.

A **Goose Neck Hitch** is a Class V hitch mounted in the bed of a pickup truck, over the rear axle. The trailer connects to a ball socket with a pivoted coupling arm.

The **Fifth Wheel Hitch** is a heavy-duty trailer hitch that mounts inside the bed of a pickup truck. Instead of using a ball hitch, the trailer attaches via a coupling king pin that locks into a large horseshoe-shaped plate.

A **Locking Differential** restricts the rotational speed of both wheels on an axle. Compared to open differentials, locking differentials are designed to offer increased traction on uneven surfaces.

TRUCK TALK

We pick the brains of two Green Industry fleet managers



Paul Hurlock, *Fleet Manager*
ArtisTree Landscape Maintenance & Design
Venice, Fla.

Landscape Management (LM): How did you wind up on this career path?

Paul Hurlock (PH): I've been a car guy for a long time. I moved down from Canada six years ago to look after the fleet here. My background is automotive and I worked for Lamborghini for many years and then for Chevrolet. I have a unique perspective from being on the other side of the fence for so long.

LM: What does the job entail for you?

PH: The purchasing of all our vehicles and managing the maintenance for them. In some cases I will design or spec-out what is needed. I also monitor gas consumption.

LM: What types of trucks are in your fleet?

PH: We have a total of about 105 trucks in the fleet. They'll range anywhere from a half-ton extended cab pickup, which would be driven by our account executives, to three-quarter-ton pickups with service bodies on them for the mechanics and irrigation crews. We have one-ton dump bodies for our shrub crews, for debris. I also have class 5 pickups for my landscape crews that are used to tow. I also have three medium-duty trucks used in our tree division. And I have a large Peterbilt that has a trash body on the back with a crane to move debris.

LM: Do you typically lease or buy your vehicles?

PH: Ninety-nine percent of the time I purchase them. If I do lease, I generally only lease them on a three- or four-year lease and run them down to the dollar. Here and there we'll do a lease, but there really haven't been any major advantages or tax breaks to leasing over buying. Because of the way we

stage our business with three different shops throughout the area, most of our vehicles don't get a lot of mileage because they're only going into communities within an approximate 10-mile radius.

LM: So how long do you typically run them?

PH: Our shrub trucks in particular don't go very far, so I have some from 1999 or 2000 still. I have some trucks that are 12 years old and still relatively low mileage, so it doesn't make sense to get rid of them. But for the most part, the bulk of my vehicles are 2006 or newer.

LM: What's the biggest challenge you face in the position?

PH: Trying to deal with some of the things that get done to the trucks. They get stuck, go through a fender bender or are run without oil.

LM: How have you combatted this problem?

PH: We really put a lot of emphasis on having a good-looking fleet, so we encourage our crews to take pride in the vehicles. There's only so much you can do when it comes to keeping a vehicle looking new, but we have been pretty successful in convincing our crew to at least check the oil every day. Besides trying to instill a sense of pride in the crews, we offer some rewards here and there. A supervisor will go out from time to time and stuff a \$10 bill in the dipstick handle. Then we'll see if the crew finds it by checking the oil. If they don't, we can tell them, "You missed out on 10 bucks today simply by not checking the oil." That's definitely helped.

LM: What's your best maintenance advice?

PH: Definitely regular oil changes. It's a small thing that is so important. We're also big on safety here. We're not a company that's going to let our crew drive around on bald tires. Our tire bill is huge because we don't mess around.

LM: What do you drive personally?

PH: I have an Infinity SUV that I drive but I probably drive my Camaro more than anything. That's part of me being a car guy. It's a 500 HP 2010 Camaro SS that I go drag racing in.

LM: Is that your dream vehicle?

PH: I love my Camaro but if I could drive anything it would probably be a Ferrari or a Lamborghini.



Paul Osborne, *Fleet & Facilities Manager*
Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care
Denver

LM: How did you get into this field?

Paul Osborne (PO): My father was a mechanic when I was younger. I changed my first motor at 12 years old and knew early on I wanted to do this as a career. Then at age 27 I ended up with two back surgeries in one year, so it was clear my days as a mechanic were limited. I'd already been running a commercial shop since the age of 20 so I decided to make the change over to full-time management. I still like to work on the vehicles from time to time.

LM: What jobs do you handle in your role?

PO: I handle the fleet and facilities for Swingle Tree's Denver and Fort Collins locations. That means everything from the alarm systems to managing the employees who cut the grass at our facilities to dealing with the utilities and creating and managing the budgets for both locations.

LM: Walk us through a typical day.

PO: I start at 6:15 a.m. and am sitting behind my desk looking through any notes my afternoon shift mechanics left me. Then I'll start answering emails and working on any reports. I may also go out and talk to the crews. Once my computer work is taken care of, I may be doing one-on-ones or senior staff meetings. I also do a lot of vendor negotiations and have appointments with them throughout the week. Afternoons may be spent working on vehicle maintenance reports or entering data into fleet management software. I also do a lot of side reports on different pieces of equipment. If we buy a stump grinder, I can tell you how often we're utilizing it so we're not buying a new one unnecessarily.

LM: What trucks do you keep in the fleet?

PO: We have over 200 pieces of rolling stock, along with chippers/trailers. We utilize lawn care vehicles both residential and commercial, tree-spraying vehicles, chipper trucks, shrub dumps, bucket trucks and some other vehicles that complete Swingle's corporate fleet.

LM: Do you purchase or lease your vehicles?

PO: The cost of capital makes it pretty advantageous for us to purchase right now. Of course we're always looking into

leasing because it keeps us honest and gives us a great "Plan B" if something falls through with a purchase. It's always smart to have an alternative plan.

LM: What's something you've learned with your years of experience?

PO: To cross utilize our equipment. We not only do landscaping and arborist work, but also Christmas lighting in the winter. So our equipment never really gets that downtime period, like most other landscape companies. So scheduling can be a challenge when it comes to equipment use. Cross utilization has been the answer.

LM: How do you think the industry sees the fleet manager role?

PO: I think fleet managers, in general, need to gain some credibility. A lot of people just see them as mechanics that have stepped up but there's a lot more to it than that. Fleet managers need schooling and training to read P&L statements or a balance sheet. They need technical skills to help steer a company in the best direction. I would urge fleet managers to take their role seriously and realize they have to be a professional. It's important to finish your degree. That adds a lot of value to the company you're working with.

LM: What's your best maintenance tip?

PO: To send out oil samples. When doing preventive maintenance, I always send out oil samples and use those reports to set intervals. If I've been changing the oil at every 3,000 miles and after sampling oil, realize I can get 5,000 or 6,000 miles out of it, I've just saved us 100 percent of preventive maintenance costs on that vehicle for that cycle. I would urge other fleet managers to utilize technology. You can really find out what works best for your fleet by utilizing technology.

LM: What do you drive personally?

PO: I'm pretty tall at 6 feet 5 inches, so I drive a full-size pickup.

LM: What's your dream vehicle?

PO: If they made one to fit me, probably a Callaway Twin Turbo or Ferrari F40.

LM: What do you see yourself doing down the road?

PO: I see a transition towards retirement. The same way I transitioned from mechanic to fleet manager, I see myself eventually transitioning from fleet manager to consultant. I have a lot of experience in DOT compliance, safety, asset acquisition, disposal and utilization, establishing key performance indicators and benchmarking, and it would be a shame not to continue to utilize that. At some point in the future, I see myself as a consultant where it would free up a little more time for myself but also still allow me to utilize the gifts I have.

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