

Problems with the bio content of red diesel

David Fletcher reports on an increasingly common problem for boaters

In the March issue Mike McKay talked about the EU laws surrounding the supply of diesel in general and red diesel for the waterways in particular. This subject has not gone away and will become a feature of our boating forever. The Department for Transport (DfT) have recently completed a consultation on the content of bio fuels in diesel and the next wave of rules is expected at the end of this year. The long-term trend is to move to 10% bio average for all transport fuels. There is concern that farmland in UK is not best employed in supporting bio fuel supplies at these volumes so the increase will not be overnight. NABO have asked that the target content is not increased above the current 3.5%. But the problem is that DfT targets and what you buy are completely different things.

At the moment most suppliers include some small bio content in red diesel, but they are free to add more if they want to, up to 7%, without any warning to the customer. Some do not include very much because it is more expensive than mineral oil. Others, generally smaller suppliers, put in none so there are some out-

lets selling bio- or FAME-free fuel available. Others are supplying road diesel with 7% bio content and just adding the dye. Individual marinas or dealers have a variety of policies: some always buy from one supplier and know what they are getting, including FAME-free; whereas others shop around for the best price. So as boaters, what you are actually getting is a complete lottery.

I spoke with RCR and they say they are now seeing a steady number of bio-fuel breakdowns. They are using a particular additive product as a shock dose to clean up cases of bug growth though it can take 72 hours to work. Some marinas are buying machines to clean up fuel tank contents, if you can get to them. I was quoted £100 to do it though GOBA previously have said £200.

I am getting conflicting advice over winter storage full/empty at the moment, but my feeling is to fill up in the autumn as I always have, dosing with chemicals, but turn over the contents early in the season. The effects of chemicals on engines and heating systems appears to be minor, or even an improvement, but that is another subject altogether.

So what should we do?

- You are most vulnerable if you are a low user with low turnover in the tank.
- Check/dip the bottom of your tank to see if there is a layer of water/sludge there already, and if there is, do something about it. Use an additive to disperse the contamination and use up the fuel, or do a full clean up.
- Keep a regular check on the water trap/filter bowl for black material or free water and have spare fuel filters available.
- Check/renew the rubber seals on fuel filler caps, particularly the brass screw-in ones, to make sure that no rain is getting in. Seal life is said to be 2 years.
- Buy diesel from somebody you trust or a supplier with a good turnover and an interest in the quality (a hire fleet operator?). Ask what you are getting: is it FAME-free, and when was the last delivery? Has it been dosed with chemical additives? (poor storage of biofuel or storage for more than 6 months in a marina tank will breed the bugs nicely for you).
- Use an additive if you are buying fuel with bio/FAME; don't mix different additives in the same tank full as it is unknown territory.
- Don't buy more fuel than you can burn within the foreseeable future, and don't chase the cheapest unless you know what you are getting.
- Fit a drain cock to the tank at the lowest point. Remember that this must include a plug or cap removable only with tools, to conform to the BSS.