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Exxon service stations in Baton Rouge are selling a new, reduced-vapor pressure gasoline that the company says should help reduce ozone pollution.

The new gasoline is being produced at the Baton Rouge Exxon Refinery.

Exxon Refinery spokesman Dave Gardner said the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency now requires all gasoline sold to have a maximum “Reid” vapor pressure of 9.5 pounds per square inch. The new Exxon gas has an RVP of 8.5 psi, he said, meaning the gas has a lower rate of evaporation.

Mike McDaniel, head of the Department of Environmental Quality's air division, said southern cities like Baton Rouge are required to sell gas with a lower vapor pressure than cities in, for instance, the Northeast or the Midwest, where problems of ozone pollution are less severe.

According to McDaniel, although the EPA now requires an RVP of 9.5 psi, beginning in 1992 that figure must be lowered to 7.8 psi.

Vapor pressure is the tendency of a liquid to evaporate, and in the case of gasoline, that vapor contributes to air pollution and to the formation of ozone.

“We produce almost a quarter of the gasoline in the Baton Rouge area and the total impact ends up being pretty significant,” Gardner said. “We estimate the reduction in hydrocarbon emissions will reduce total auto emissions by about 2.5 percent. Our calculations show that's equivalent to taking about 5,000 vehicles off the road.”

The reduction in air pollution provided by the lower vapor pressure gasoline should provide for a two to three ton-per-day reduction in emissions, the Exxon spokesman said.

“We feel like any movement toward reducing vapor pressure in gasolines is going to be helpful both from air toxics and ozone abatement perspectives,” McDaniel said. “We went through a cycle where the RVPs were climbing and now they're tapering and going back down. I've heard numbers ranging from 11.5 to 13 psi, but since the federal program has come in during the regulated months — mid-May through Mid-September in our area — that number has been dropped to 9.5.”

According to a news release from Exxon, “The reformulated gasolines are being introduced by Exxon on a voluntary basis. Although the new gasolines cost more to produce, Exxon's wholesale price in the marketplace for these products will be competitive with other premium and mid-grade gasolines.”

McDaniel said the EPA rule to lower gasoline vapor pressure “is expected to cost the American consumer about $460 million annually, or about one-cent per gallon of gas. But savings from improved fuel economy is expected to offset costs by about $230 million.”

EPA's rules also mandate more energy dense fuel in addition to reduced evaporative emissions, McDaniel said.

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