



BY J. MAC McCLELLAN

LEFT SEAT

Avfuel outlook

Avfuel president Craig Sincock was by the other day to talk about aviation fuel, particularly for general and business aviation. Avfuel is a fuel supplier as opposed to an oil company. Avfuel's business is taking oil already out of the ground and delivering it in the proper jet fuel or avgas form at the FBO. Avfuel is now the biggest supplier in terms of number of branded FBOs in the country, and continues its rapid growth.

Barring a war or some other global calamity, Sincock does not see any threat to the availability of aviation fuel over the next several years. Refinery fires or some other catastrophe could cause spot shortages, but there is plenty of fuel to keep the nation's airplanes of all types flying. The good news is that nothing looms on the horizon that would restrict the supply.

The bad news, or at least worrisome news, is that government regulation could make aviation fuel, particularly avgas, harder to get, and more expensive. The environmental concerns about lead loom over avgas in the long term, and there is no viable replacement yet for 100LL avgas. If lead were banned, a big chunk of the fleet would be grounded.

An even more immediate concern for avgas supply is the underground tank rules that require all buried tanks to be brought to the surface, or replaced with monitored double-walled tanks by the end of this year. This is a big expense and many old tanks are yet to be replaced. There may not be enough capacity to replace all the tanks by the deadline, and some small FBOs may not be able to afford a new tank system, either above or below ground.

The small FBO is Sincock's biggest concern. With annual fuel sales less than a busy car gas station would do in a couple of weeks, how can a small FBO make it? Avfuel tries to help with its fuel tank division that provides turnkey systems at a very effective price. Avfuel also offers insurance specialized to the needs of FBOs. Avfuel's sales are rising, but that growth is primarily at the busy airports. Many small airports have stagnant or declining fuel sales and the future is not promising.

I like Craig. Yes, he's making a nice living from the aviation fuel business—and it is a business—but he is at his core a general aviation believer and user. Craig stays current in a number of airplanes, keeps in close contact with his dealers, and does his best to keep costs under control. He can only sell you fuel for your airplane, not your car or boat, so if you don't fly, he doesn't make a living. I like that kind of focus in a company and its president.