

FAA to evaluate nine unleaded fuels

Possible avgas replacements proposed

BY DAVE HIRSCHMAN

THE SEARCH FOR AN UNLEADED FUEL to replace avgas moved forward as the FAA received nine proposals for its Piston Aviation Fuels Initiative (PAFI) by the July 1 deadline.

The formal submissions came from fuel producers Afton Chemical Company, Avgas LLC, Shell, Swift Fuels, and a consortium made up of BP, TOTAL, and Hjelmcö.

“Aviation organizations, the petroleum industry, and the FAA are working collaboratively to ensure the aviation community will have access to unleaded fuel that meets performance and safety standards, is affordable, and can be used by the existing fleet with minimal disruption,” said AOPA President Mark Baker. “We are pleased with the progress so far and look forward to the next phase.”

PAFI is an industry-government effort to develop and deploy a safe, new unleaded avgas for the piston-engine aircraft fleet. In addition to AOPA and the FAA, the PAFI Steering Group includes the American Petroleum Institute, the Experimental Aircraft Association, the General Aviation Manufacturers Association, the National Air Transportation Association, and the National Business Aviation Association.

The FAA will now begin assessing the candidate fuels based on safety, costs, production and distribution, and environmental impact.

The most promising fuels will undergo laboratory testing led by the FAA’s William J. Hughes Technical Center beginning in September. Fuel developers will each be asked to supply 100 gallons of fuel for phase one testing. Fuels that are determined to be potentially viable replacements in this evaluation will move to phase two, which is comprised of full-scale engine and aircraft testing. This will require 10,000 gallons of fuel from each developer and will generate standardized performance data necessary to demonstrate scalability of production, and support qualification and fleet-wide certification data.

Congress fully supports this program and its goal of deploying a new unleaded replacement avgas by 2018, and provided \$6 million in the current fiscal year. Both the U.S. House and Senate appropriations committees have proposed spending another \$6 million on the program next year, which is \$300,000 above President Obama’s request.

There are approximately 167,000 piston-engine aircraft in the United States and a total of 230,000 worldwide that primarily rely on the currently available 100LL avgas. It is the only remaining transportation fuel in the United States that contains added tetraethyl lead.

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