

Study: Wisconsinites have mixed views on ethanol

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A majority of Wisconsinites support the use of ethanol blends if it keeps dollars and jobs in the United States and reduces air pollution, according to a new study by University of Wisconsin-Madison researchers.

But that support dropped substantially if those surveyed were told that ethanol could harm their engine or reduce [gas mileage](#). About two-thirds said they would not support ethanol under these conditions. It is generally believed that ethanol will not hurt newer engines, but studies have shown that it will cause minimal reductions in mileage compared to gasoline.

"Understandably, this poll indicates mixed attitudes toward the pros and cons of ethanol," says Bret Shaw, assistant professor of life sciences communication at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and environmental communication specialist for UW-Extension.

Respondents' actual knowledge about ethanol was also mixed. While ethanol does, in fact, burn cleaner than gasoline, only 53 percent believed this to be the case, while 41 percent thought the two were about the same and 6 percent believed ethanol burns dirtier than gasoline.

Asked about ethanol's impact on the environment, 41 percent believed that it causes less damage than [gasoline](#), 15 percent thought ethanol was more damaging and 44 percent believe the two were about the same. There is debate among scientists and industry groups on this question. Although ethanol burns cleaner, detractors argue that its environmental

benefits are overstated because demand for crops needed to produce it may accelerate the conversion of forests and other natural, carbon-absorbing [ecosystems](#) to [farmland](#).

The survey found considerable doubt about ethanol's [economic benefits](#). Only 43 percent believed domestically produced ethanol increases U.S. jobs, while 46 percent thought it would have no effect and 10 percent believed ethanol use would decrease jobs. Similarly, relatively few respondents thought ethanol would decrease their own [fuel costs](#). Thirty-one percent thought it would boost the price at the pump, 41 percent said that it has no impact and 28 percent believed it lowers pump prices. Ethanol blends are generally thought to decrease fuel prices at the pump for Wisconsin consumers.

Overall, support for ethanol was highest among people who were younger, more educated, Democrats and those living in a county where an active biofuels plant was located.

Respondents were interviewed in June and July as part of the most recent UW-Madison Badger Poll. Data was collected from 556 persons chosen at random within households with landline telephones. The overall response rate for the survey is 39.6 percent with a 4.2 percent margin of error. The analysis was conducted by Bret Shaw and Michael Cacciatore, doctoral student in the UW-Madison Department of Life Sciences Communication.

More information: www.uwsc.wisc.edu/bpoll.php

Provided by University of Wisconsin-Madison

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