

Fuel ethers consortium expects smooth REACH ride

Group seeks technical experts for registration dossier

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A REACH registration consortium for fuel ethers is expected to be launched on 9 April. It is currently looking for experts to handle the technical aspects of REACH registration of the three fuel oxygenates: methyl - tert - butyl - ether (MTBE), ethyl - tert - butyl - ether and tert - amyl - methyl - ether (TAME).

At present the consortium is assessing a number of responses from service providers that could handle the technical submissions required under REACH. Because of their structural similarity, and the ability to read across some of the data, the consortium wants to group the risk assessment process for the three substances.

Graeme Wallace, director general of the European Fuel Oxygenates Association (EFOA), expects registration of the substances to be a relatively straightforward process.

The EU risk assessment for MTBE was completed in 2001 and that for TAME is about to be published. EFOA notes that the EU Technical Committee on New and Existing Substances agreed to consider ETBE as equivalent to MTBE in terms of its risk assessment and associated risk reduction measures and effectively agreed to read across risk assessments for these structurally similar substances - a first for the EU.

“ While you can never say never - we do not anticipate any new testing. REACH will largely be an exercise in sourcing and inputting data and submitting it, ” says Mr Wallace. None of the ethers is expected to require authorisation.

He notes that a number of companies involved with the consortium are keen to proceed quickly with the fuel ethers so as to help them understand the REACH process before they go forward with potentially trickier substances within their portfolio.

Just over 20 companies which either produce or import fuel ethers in Europe have signed up to join the consortium, representing the majority of the market. More

refiners, including a number from Eastern Europe, could join as the registration process proceeds.

A steering group was set up last year to define the consortium ' s structure and decide on data ownership and cost sharing. These issues should be settled by the next full meeting in April. A technical task force has been working on data analysis and searching for experts to handle the technical aspects of registration.