MtBE REVISITED

Methyl Tertiary Butyl Ether (MtBE), an oxygenate added to gasoline to reduce air pollution, has in the past few months become a contaminant of great concern. The chemical itself is not new, in fact, it has been manufactured in the late 1970's and has been widely used since the early 1990's. The reason for all of the recent publicity is that MtBE has been found in various amounts in well and municipal systems throughout the country. The AWWA reports that it has been found in areas from the rural towns of Ronan, Montana and Spring Green, Wisconsin to major metropolitan areas such as Dallas, Las Vegas and Denver. Most detections have been noted in states on the East and West Coasts. Ethanol, another familiar oxygenate and an alcohol derived from corn is more popularly used in Midwestern states.

The California Department of Health Services is currently working on establishing a primary maximum contaminant level (MCL) of 13 µg/L (13 ppb) for the chemical and other states are quickly following suit. (A primary maximum contaminant level is established based on potential health effects if the level is exceeded. Primary MCLs are not to be exceeded by public water systems and are enforceable.) If everything remains on schedule for approval, California's MCL will become effective in the middle of May, 2000. Until the new MCL is established, they will continue to use the 13 µg/L action level.

MCLs can be established at both the State and Federal levels. If a Federal MCL exists, state levels may differ, however they may not be higher than Federal levels,. Currently there is no Federally established MCL for MtBE. It is being considered by the EPA to be added to the list of contaminants regulated under the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA). The EPA currently is attempting to pass regulation to individual states to be able to reduce or eliminate the use of MtBE in gasoline as an oxygenate in their state.. Current regulations under the Clean Air Act require 2 percent oxygen in gasoline for air pollution reduction of which both MtBE and Ethanol are currently used.

Because MtBE is extremely soluable in water and is of very low molecular weight, the life of standard carbon filtration is greatly reduced as compared to other VOC's. In order to make a claim for MtBE removal, the National Sanitation Foundation added MtBE to the list of contaminants for Standard 53 in June of 1999. Manufacturers must have their systems challenged with MtBE specifically to substantiate any claims made. Systems that currently make a claim for VOC reduction based on Chloroform surrogate testing cannot make an MtBE removal claim without additional testing. Please contact NSF for further information on approved systems.

National Testing Laboratories, Ltd. is pleased to announce that ***MtBE has been added permanently*** to the battery of tests checked for on our *WATERCHECK* and *WATERCHECK WITH PESTICIDES* test packages for drinking water. The MDL (minimum detection level) of 0.004 mg/l (4 ppb) has been established for both packages. The *WATERCHECK* will now check for 75 items including: bacteria, heavy metals and minerals, other inorganic chemicals, physical characteristics and volatile organic chemicals. The *WATERCHECK WITH PESTICIDES* also adds a check for pesticides, herbicides and PCB's for a total of 95 items. No additional fees or charges will be added on to your current prices. Please contact a representative if you have any questions or are in need of any additional information.