

# County encouraged to use ethanol-blended fuel

By Tom Betz

*The Goodland Star-News*  
Many Sherman County vehicles are using ethanol-blended fuel when possible, and representatives of the Farm Bureau were at the county commission meeting Friday to encourage more use by the county.

Gerald Franklin and Valerie Kaup of the Sherman County Farm Bureau talked about the grain-based fuel, telling commissioners that this is a way to help the agriculture economy.

Franklin said the use of ethanol fuel lowers emissions, improves engine performance and reduces our dependence on Middle East oil. "At Frontier Equity, it is the same price as unleaded," Franklin said, "and we have been working with them to keep it the same. We would encourage the county to consider using ethanol blended fuel when possible."

Curt Way, public works director, said in most cases the road and bridge vehicles are using the gasohol fuel except when the pump is not available. "We have been working on that," Franklin said, "and now there are more pumps with the ethanol to make it easier to use."

Franklin said it especially is good for the vehicles this time of year because the blended fuel acts like a gas-line anti-freeze. Way said that this department has been pleased with the results of using the fuel.

Franklin asked about the other county vehicles, and the county commissioners said they would send a recommendation to the departments to use the ethanol as much as possible since it is the same price as unleaded.

Someone asked about the availability of bio-diesel, fuel oil blended with soybean oil, and

Franklin said it was possible to purchase it in bulk, but that it is not available at the pumps yet.

"We're still working on that," he said.

Michael Balthazor and Chad Zimmerman of the Northwest Local Environmental Protection Group told commissioner state budget cuts are a threat to the group, which inspects wells and septic systems and does other sanitation chores for area counties.

Balthazor said the group had been in operation for 13 years and covers 16 counties in northwest Kansas.

The annual cost is about \$130,000, he said, and that has been the same for years until the state started cutting. He said this past year the state budget was cut to \$112,000.

"We get about \$4,000 to \$5,000 a year in fees," he said, "but that leaves us about \$16,000 short."

He said the group has a reserve fund of \$35,000 which will get them through this year, but won't last long.

"We have three options," he said. "One is to raise fees, but even doubling what we currently get will bring in a maximum of \$10,000. That still leaves us \$11,000 short."

The second option is to seek outside grants, and Balthazor said they are working with several foundations.

The third option is to ask counties for tax money, either with a formula based on usage, or simply \$1,000 per county.

He said he feels that the problems

could kill or diminish the program.

"If we go out of existence, who will enforce the codes and do the inspections?" Balthazor asked.

Sherman County Commissioner Mitch Tiede asked if the group was still doing water well testing.

Balthazor said they provide this service free to homeowners. The water is tested in labs in Hill City and Colby.

"These are screening tests," Balthazor said, "and they are designed to tell us what is in the water. They are not full scientific tests, but if there is something that needs further testing we will know that from these tests."

Balthazor said there currently is no county funding directly to the program, but there are small "in-kind" matches.

Commissioner Kevin Rasure

said he felt raising the fees might be the first step, and he and Tiede agreed the county might find some money.

Balthazor said the advisory board would take up this issue; he said Sherryl Ketter of the county health department is the Sherman County representative.

He said if a majority wants to raise the fees, there is a requirement for public hearings to change the permit process.

About 80 contractors are licensed through the program at \$50 each, he said which brings in \$4,000 per year.

In other business, commissioners:

- Approved appointment of Greg Nemecheck, farmer, as one of two county representatives to the Western Prairie Resource Conservation

and Development board. Sharon Bowker, who works at Elliott's, is the other.

- Appointed Ron Barkley, retired teacher, to the Good Samaritan Center board for a three-year term. He replaces the Rev. Loren Strait, pastor of First Christian Church.

- Approved month-end bills totaling \$90,981.

- Asked members of the Sherman County Economic Development Council to take the new language of

the council's resolution expanding the board back to their board for a formal approval. The final draft is expected to be on the commission agenda for approval on March 11.

- Canvassed the primary election ballots and certified the winners.

- Received a letter of resignation from Steve Evert from the county ambulance service. He told the commissioners after handing it to them that it was for personal reasons.

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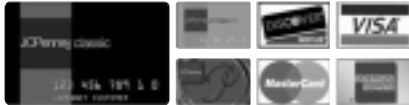
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