Zemo Partnership's Andy Eastlake

Removing fossil carbon is the first step on the road to zero

The UK launch of E10 at the beginning of September was a reminder that electrification is not the only game in town in terms of decarbonising our vehicles. Increasing the bioethanol content in our standard petrol from 5% to 10% will have a major step change impact on GHG emissions and is an important complement to the progress we're all making on electrification.

Over the next decade, some of the biggest and most accessible opportunities for cutting CO2 from road transport will be delivered by increasing the renewable fuels content of petrol and, particularly, diesel which will still fuel most of our vehicles for years (at least a decade) to come.

The Government's recently published transport decarbonisation plan included a lengthy section, highlighting the role of sustainable, renewable fuels in UK transport and their role – particularly in the near term – as a support to the drive for widespread electrification. In fact, in all the excitement, you may have missed that on the same day the main obligation for renewable fuels in transport was increased by 50%, acknowledging the vital near term contribution they can make to decarbonisation.

E10 petrol reduces emissions by replacing a larger proportion of our traditional fossil fuels with bioethanol produced from wheat, corn or sugar beet, or from biogenic wastes. Supplies to the UK market have to meet rigorous sustainability criteria. Also the amount of fuel from crops is capped and must reduce over time.

As every new petrol car and van built since 2011 has been designed to use E10, the change won't be an issue for most fleets, but those with older vehicles can check them out using the DfT E10 vehicle checker, which covers cars, motorcycles and mopeds. (Zemo has also produced quick and easy number plate-driven compatibility checker).

Zemo Partnership recently also produced a study (referenced in the TDP) into the prospects for high blend renewable fuels (HBRF) which showed that there are very significant opportunities for sustainable, renewable fuel adoption by heavy duty vehicles and, in particular, trucks and coaches which are currently responsible for around 5% of the UK's total GHG emissions.

The study showed that with a market average of 30% HBRF, used in place of fossil fuels (diesel and natural gas) by 2030, the sector could save an additional 46m tonnes in GHG emissions over the next decade, with savings continuing to 2050.

The renewable fuels covered were biodiesel, hydrotreated vegetable oil and biomethane. The study showed that reducing the barriers to adoption of these fuels and maximising their use in high blends could be a great complement, supporting different rates of electrification across fleets. (And we've been working since to reduce one of the key barriers through the introduction of our Renewable Fuels Assurance Scheme which gives clear and robust information about the fuel life cycle greenhouse gas emissions and wider sustainability performance of renewable fuels supplied in the UK.)

I recently chaired a GreenFleet round-table event for heavy duty vehicle operators, focusing on the 'Transition to Biofuels'. Supported by Iveco, attendees had the opportunity to drive that latest S-WAY Natural Power truck and to discuss and share their experiences of operating on biomethane. Every person there was committed to rapidly reducing the carbon impact of their fleet and supported the long term aims, but before we change the heavy trucks on our roads, maybe the best first step is to remove the fossil carbon from the ones we currently use. Perhaps 'Net Zero' is just a waypoint on the journey to absolute zero.

FURTHER INFORMATION

www.zemo.org.uk