

Tech Talk - Questions for your fuel supplier



No fueling around

Working with an experienced diesel supplier can make a difference.

Abstract

The pace of change in the trucking industry continues to grow rapidly, leaving fleet managers to work tirelessly in an effort to stay one step ahead of new technologies. The diesel fuel space is no exception, and many fleets have realized the potential benefits of working even more closely with their fuel supplier to ensure they are using the right product for their fleet.

When consulting with a fuel supplier—or even looking for a new partner in the space—it can be easy to ask the standard questions while overlooking some key areas regarding performance, maintenance, logistics, and general industry at large, given the mind-set that ‘diesel is just diesel’ remains prevalent.

Beginning a dialogue to better understand the products and services suppliers provide, and what will best meet your fleet’s needs, can be vital in determining a fleet’s success.

Here are six important questions that fleet managers/equipment operators should discuss with their current or potential fuel supplier, with insights into these areas:

1. How is my product handled, stored, and transported?

Fuel can be easily contaminated. For example, a common on-site storage issue is the presence of water in the tanks, which can lead to bacteria growth in the fuel. In turn, the bacterial growth can result in filter-plugging issues that can translate into added downtime and overall decreased fleet efficiency.

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Having a conversation with your supplier about their regulatory awareness, safety focus, and qualifications for the carriers that store and handle its products can lead to peace of mind and help build trust. Confidence in a reliable fuel supplier is particularly critical given the average U.S. fleet spends between 30% and 40% of its maintenance, repair, and operations (MRO) budget on fuel.

2. Should I use an additized diesel? Will it cost more?

When it comes to additized diesel, there are a number of different variables to consider, such as the type and concentration of the additive as well as how it is added into the diesel fuel. For the sake of consistency, the focus of this article will be strictly limited to detergent additives.

While an additized diesel product will cost more than a base diesel fuel at the onset, it is a superior product that is designed to ultimately lower fuel consumption, emissions and improve both power and responsiveness, among other benefits.

While the product itself is more expensive, the performance benefits additized diesel provides are designed to increase a fleet's overall efficiency. This can help the fleet meet sustainability goals and help reduce the long-term total cost of ownership of each vehicle.



3. Does your product provide performance benefits?

An additized diesel will help maintain optimal performance in the engine's fuel system. This translates to fuel savings, better power, and cleaner combustion when compared to trucks and equipment running unadditized diesel fuel. Protecting the fuel system with the detergent can also help increase a fleet's overall efficiency.

Oftentimes, fleet managers and equipment operators are not too concerned about the diesel they use, in large part because their vehicles' engines are under warranty. Even though the maintenance may be covered, however, taking the truck off the road remains costly.

In fact, more advanced, additized diesel offerings can also work to provide benefits to those circumstances not covered under warranty, such as premature fuel filter plugging.

Over time, realizing these benefits from a high-performing additized diesel can lower the total cost of ownership and upkeep across a fleet.

Reducing the number of trips to the shop can provide more efficiency across operations and a stronger return on investment.



4. How are additives administered into your products?

While a base diesel product will come ready to use, if a fleet wants to use a more advanced product—such as an additized diesel—that fuel offering may vary in terms of how these additives are mixed with the fuel. The preferred way is to receive the additive injected into the diesel by your supplier. This assures the product is properly mixed to meet performance expectations in your engines. While there are alternative ways of putting additives into fuel, care should be taken to ensure the fuel is homogenous and properly dosed. In particular, hand dosing is not recommended.

Inadequate mixing can result in filter plugging from undissolved additives; underdosing is likely to result in underperformance versus claims, while overdosing could potentially lead to operational issues. It's important to ask for proof that the additive and fuel are homogenous and the additive concentration is within specification.



5. Should I be looking at alternative fuel options?

While alternative fuels have become more popular in recent years, we do not expect diesel use to dwindle anytime soon. In fact, we expect the opposite. According to ExxonMobil's 2017 Outlook for Energy: A View to 2040, diesel use will continue to rise globally approximately 30% through 2040, in large part to meet increasing trucking demands. While diesel growth will come primarily in the Asia Pacific region, there will be pockets of growth in the Americas as well, particularly in Latin America and specific sectors in the U.S.

As diesel formulations continue to evolve, advanced diesel products, such as additized diesel will continue to offer impressive fuel economy and maintenance benefits while reducing emissions.

6. How do you ensure your fuel meets product specifications?

It is essential for the well-being of your fleet and equipment that the diesel fuel meets all relevant product specifications, and all diesel fuel suppliers should be well aware that this is the case.

With that said, a leading fuel supplier will have a robust product-testing methodology in place, reinforcing its commitment to product integrity. If the fuel supplier's testing parameters go beyond what is required, even better. That may indicate the supplier is dedicated to providing you with quality diesel fuel that goes above and beyond industry specifications, adding an extra level of protection.

Combining the right diesel fuel supply with the highest quality service and fuel supplier can have big benefits for fleets and off-road equipment in today's diesel landscape.

