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API: CF-4 Diesel Oil Now Obsolete

By Lisa Tocci

WASHINGTON, D.C. – API CF-4, a heavy-duty diesel engine oil category that debuted 17 years ago and continues to hold a sliver of the market, was declared obsolete yesterday by the American Petroleum Institute's Lubricants Committee at its semi-annual standards meeting here. Beginning immediately, no new licenses for the category will be accepted or issued.

The demise of CF-4 was pretty much a given, since one key engine test for the category – the 600-hour Mack T-6 test that measures piston and ring wear, viscosity change and oil consumption – is no longer available. API had asked ASTM, which defines the test, whether the newer Mack T-12 test might be an acceptable substitute, but ASTM's Heavy Duty Engine Oil Classification Panel came back with a firm negative. There's no data to support a correlation between the two tests (they use different engines and measure different performance parameters), so this option is not open, the panel responded.

The Engine Manufacturers Association, which represents the interests of diesel engine builders, has already agreed that without the test to support it, API CF-4 licensing needs to be discontinued, Kevin Ferrick of API told the meeting. The engine builders also requested that API encourage its licensees to upgrade their products to at least CH-4, the performance standard that was introduced in December 1998 and is fully backward compatible with the expiring category.

API will stop accepting new CF-4 licenses immediately, and will also notify its licensees that the category has become obsolete. API CF-4 will be removed from the slate of licensed products after 12 full months have elapsed, meaning all CF-4 licenses will expire on or before June 30, 2008. That one-year period is meant to give any current licensees time to develop, test and roll out an upgraded oil to the marketplace.

Lubricants Committee Chairman Jim Newsom, of Shell Oil, asked whether upgrading to CG-4 or CH-4 will involve passing a far more difficult battery of tests – it will – and wondered if there were not some way to keep CF-4 alive, given that some customers still seem to want it. However, the committee's vice chairman, Barbara Dennis of BP Lubricants, reminded all that to be licensable, a category has to be open to new chemistry, which



means having the tests needed to support it; otherwise, the market would be unfairly limited to current participants only.

While many licensees already have a CH-4 or higher oil in their product lines, Ferrick said that a number of marketers will feel the impact of the change, including 331 brands that have CF-4 as their top offering. "Whether or not they will upgrade, API will end the licenses," he advised, because the category cannot be supported.

Although the category is now obsolete, meeting attendees didn't seem to expect CF-4 to disappear soon. "You can use current CF-4 chemistry for as long as it exists, right?" questioned one participant. That's so, confirmed Ferrick and others. The key difference will be that API will not license the product, so marketers won't be able to show the API trademarked "donut" logo on their containers. "We can't certify what we consider to be obsolete," Ferrick stated.

The change also does not affect the licensing of oils meeting CF and CF-2, two other older diesel oils intended to service off-road and severe-duty two-cycle diesels, respectively; some of the latter are used in buses and military vehicles, for example. These categories do not rely on the Mack T-6, and the tests to support them are still in place. "From an API standpoint," Ferrick said, "you can still qualify CF and CF-2, and as long as the tests are out there, we can continue to license it."

Also during the meeting, Ferrick told the committee that API 1509, the governing standard for the Engine Oil Licensing and Certification System, now is maintained completely online, at www.api.org/eolcs, for easy reading or downloading by anyone who's interested. This means the document can be rapidly updated and republished whenever changes are made.

API's Engine Oil Guide for consumers also has been updated (although it will have to be touched up again, now that CF-4 is obsolete), and its English language version has been joined by translations into Spanish and Chinese. Another version, in French, is promised soon, too, which should be welcome in the bilingual Canadian market.

API also plans to offer a seminar on Base Oil Interchange and Viscosity Grade Read Across guidelines targeted to oil marketers in Asia, in conjunction with Fuels & Lubes Asia's 2nd Asia-Pacific Base Oil Conference in Beijing, China, Oct. 23-25.

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George Gill, Editor. *Lube Report* (ISSN 1547-3392), *Lubes'n'Greases Magazine* and *Lubricants Industry Sourcebook* are published by LNG Publishing Co., Inc., 6105-G Arlington Blvd., Falls Church, Virginia 22044 USA. Phone: (703) 536-0800. Fax: (703) 536-0803. Website: www.LNGpublishing.com. Email: info@LNGpublishing.com. For sponsor information contact Gloria Steinberg Briskin at (800) 474-8654 or (703) 536-7676 or gloria@LNGpublishing.com.

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