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NATIONAL OILHEAT RESEARCH ALLIANCE

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The National Oilheat Research Alliance (NORA) is a collaborative program established to strengthen the heating oil industry by improving education and training for employees, providing information to consumers, and developing new products for oilheat customers. The heating oil industry is primarily composed of small businesses, and NORA has provided the opportunity for marketers and dealers to work cooperatively to build a stronger, more competitive industry. NORA has developed world class education programs, more efficient appliances, and a strong consumer education campaign highlighting the benefits of oilheat.

In 2005, Congress extended NORA for an additional five years, but only after the program had lapsed for eight months. That lapse was extremely disruptive, resulting in delayed projects and requiring a restructuring of operations. Current law expires early next year.

NORA is essential to the long term future of the heating oil industry, and reauthorization will ensure that oilheat customers continue to reap the benefits.

LEGISLATION NEEDED

During the 110th Congress, Senators Jack Reed (D-RI) and Olympia Snowe (R-ME) introduced S. 3442 that would reauthorize and improve the 2000 NORA legislation. The Reed-Snowe bill would improve the operation of NORA and ensure that the heating oil industry and consumers can continue to reap the benefits of the program. A new version of the legislation is expected to be introduced soon. First, the proposed legislation would extend the program for an additional ten years, which will ensure continuity of contracts and allow for long-term planning and initiatives. Second, the definition of oilheat would be expanded to include blendstocks used for home heating, including new cleaner biofuels. Third, the funding mechanism would be modified to bring it into conformity with the propane check-off program. Finally, the bill makes technical changes to address problems identified since 2000 (e.g, establishing a mechanism for additional States to join).

The Reed-Snowe bill would provide the best means for enabling the heating oil industry to finance R&D, training, safety, and consumer information without the use of federal tax dollars.

NORA ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- NORA developed highly efficient home boilers and furnaces now available in the marketplace. Prior to NORA, the top efficiency for oilheat equipment was 86 percent. NORA developed an oilheat furnace that reaches 95 percent efficiency, and a boiler with a 93 percent efficiency rating.
- NORA completed an interactive database that tracks all training records, and also provides up-to-date training opportunities. It will allow Heating Technicians to access detailed reports on their credential status. Educators can easily post CEUs for their students and conduct communication to potential students for upcoming classes through this robust database.
- NORA developed a user friendly software program for demonstrating the advantages of upgrading older heating and hot water system to new, higher efficiency equipment called the Fuel Savings Analysis Calculator (FSA). This efficiency calculator will provide valuable information to consumers on the advantages of upgrading to more efficient equipment.
- NORA has developed a wealth of educational materials for the heating oil industry. These include books on how to assist consumers in saving energy, improving equipment performance and how to prevent leaks and respond to petroleum releases.
- NORA also partnered with community colleges, and vocational schools (private and public) to establish training curricula that serve the needs of the industry for well trained employees. NORA offers training to recent graduates and individuals seeking a new career.
- NORA has developed effective communication vehicles to inform customers that oilheat is a modern, high quality product delivered by local businesses. In the coming years, NORA will work to ensure all consumers have access to information about high efficient equipment.
- NORA continues to improve tank quality. The safe storage of oil is of critical importance, and NORA is developing new technologies, better inspection techniques, and more effective ways to remediate leaks.
- NORA has been working with the National Biodiesel Board to bring biofuels to the heating oil industry. Called BioHeat, biofuels have excellent performance abilities and are cleaner than other sources. The American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) has given preliminary approval to revising its specifications for biodiesel blending which would allow BioHeat blends of B5 (a five percent blend). ASTM also gave preliminary approval for 6 percent (B6) to 20 percent (B20) blends of biodiesel.

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