EPA s Response to 60 Minutes Story

- If people are concerned about the impact of MTBE on their drinking water, they should contact their state drinking water office.

- If people want to see if MTBE is in their water supply, they should contact their local water supplier. If they would like to have their water tested for MTBE, some county health departments will conduct free drinking water testing. In addition, each state has a list of certified labs that can (for a fee) test the water.

- From a drinking water standpoint, EPA believes that the levels of MTBE occurring thus far (apart from spills and other catastrophic incidents) are still considerably below health concern levels -- typically less than 20 parts per billion (ppb). Nevertheless, EPA certainly agrees that MTBE is a contaminant of concern that needs further attention in a number of respects

- EPA will propose a standard for MTBE based on taste and odor by late Fall. This will codify EPA's Drinking Water Advisory on MTBE, published December 1997. States can adopt and enforce this standard. Managing MTBE to levels preventing taste and odor problems should protect against potential health effects, since levels causing taste and odor are 20,000 to 100,000 times lower than levels causing adverse health effects in rodent tests.

- EPA is conducting human health studies to gather more information about the health effects of MTBE. Currently we are awaiting the results of a pharmacokinetic study (on oral, dermal, and inhalation routes of exposure), expected by Spring 2000, which will provide the basis to accurately translate health effects from breathing MTBE to ingesting it in drinking water. This will allow EPA to make a determination on human health effects.

- Additionally, EPA is conducting a bathing and shower study which will provide exposure data.

- To gather more information on where MTBE is being detected in drinking water, EPA included MTBE in the Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule, finalized in August, 1999. This rule will require all large and a representative sample of small public water systems to monitor for MTBE in ground water and surface water. Water systems must monitor beginning in 2001. EPA is encouraging water systems to begin monitoring earlier.

- Additionally, EPA is nearing completion of a study with the USGS to collect existing MTBE data from a statistically representative sample of public water systems and monitoring wells in 12 Northeastern States.

- States are currently conducting source water assessments for all public water supplies in

their state. These assessments will look at the vulnerability of all water supply sources to potential contamination. EPA is encouraging states to being their assessments by looking at the vulnerability to MTBE. States have to complete all assessments by 2003.

- EPA established a Blue Ribbon panel to look at the issues raised by the use of MTBE and its effects on both air and drinking water quality. The Panel released its recommendations in July 1999, and stressed the need for Congress to remove the current 2% oxygen requirement in the Clean Air Act Amendments. The Panel also recommended to enhance and expand existing programs to improve water protection and prevention.

- Treatment of MTBE-contaminated water is feasible with readily available and proven volatile organic chemical (VOC) removal technologies, such as air stripping, granular activated carbon, and advanced oxidation. These are the technologies typically used to remove benzene, a carcinogenic gasoline component. Such technologies must be optimized for MTBE removal and may be more expensive than for other VOCs. Public water systems that conduct routine monitoring for VOCs can test for MTBE at little additional cost.

- For more information on MTBE and the Agency's actions thus far, visit URL: **http://www.epa.gov/OGWDW/mtbe.html.** Information on the Blue Ribbon Panel is available at **http://www.epa.gov/oms/consumer/fuels/oxypanel/blueribb.htm**