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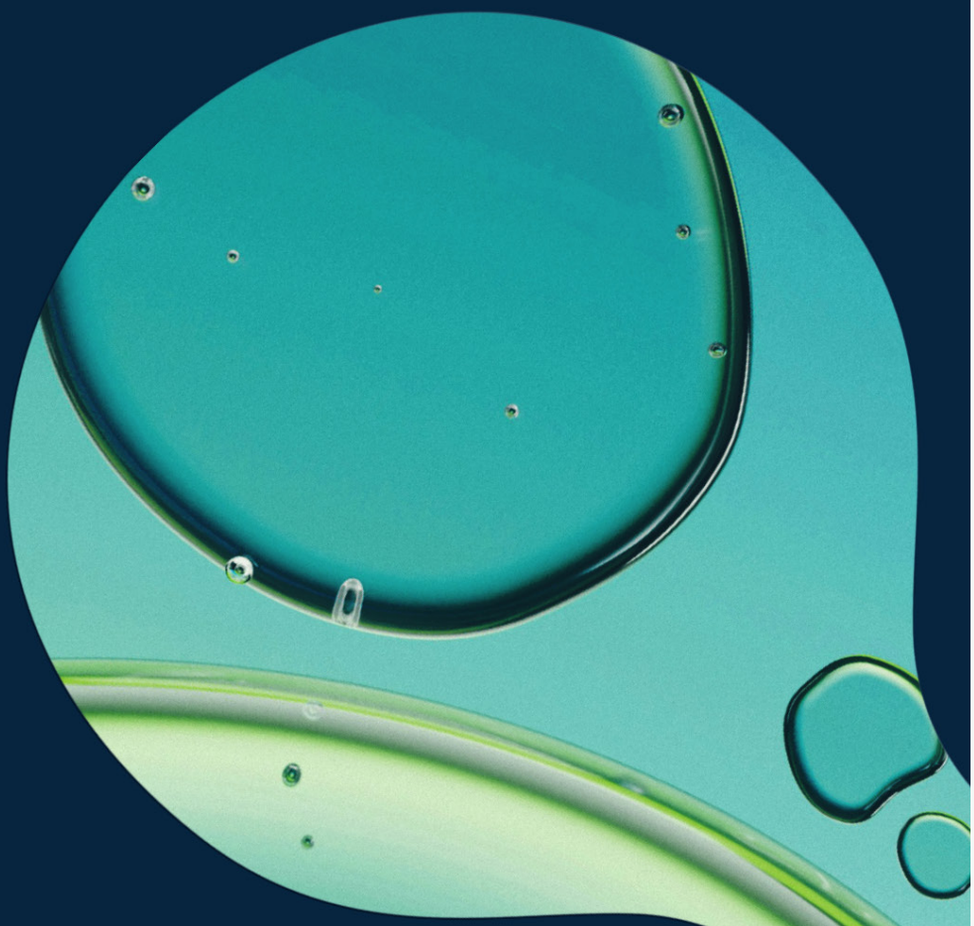

Biofuels:
Ready or Not!

Can your operation handle them?

Dr Dan Clarke
Independent Consultant, Science & Technology

Unavoidable transition has arrived, and shipowners feel it more than anyone. Decarbonisation targets are tightening, regulators have set timelines, and the era of traditional fossil marine fuels is drawing nearer to a close. Subsequently biofuels, especially FAME based blends, are moving from “interesting pilot projects” to “mandatory operational reality.”

Unfortunately, the industry doesn’t get to choose the timing. What it can choose is how prepared it will be.

Fleet managers, chief engineers, technical directors, ship owners and all the people keeping global shipping moving require clarity and practical solutions not greenwashing. The message is simple:

Biofuels are coming, and the winners will be the ones who turn a regulatory burden into a controlled, reliable, and commercially viable part of their operations.

Shipowners are pragmatic. They invest in what works, what lasts, and what keeps their vessels on schedule. Biofuels disrupt that logic:

- They’re being pushed by regulation and emissions, not performance.
- They behave differently from the fuels that engines and systems were built for.
- They introduce new risks such as instability, water uptake and waxing that threaten reliability.
- They demand new handling procedures, new monitoring routines, additional costs.

The unease and resistance to adoption isn’t there for the sake of it. It’s operational caution born from decades of experience.

The uneasy truth is that biofuels bring real operational challenges

Marine engineers know the issues well, and they’re not theoretical:

- **Oxidative instability,** particularly FAME, leads to gum formation, sludge, and clogged filters.
- **Water absorption** accelerates microbial growth and leads to corrosion.
- **Cold flow problems** cause waxing and gelling in colder climates.
- **Shorter storage life** complicates bunkering strategies and seasonal operations.
- **Material compatibility issues** can degrade seals, elastomers, and coatings.

These are not minor inconveniences, they directly affect reliability, maintenance cycles, and safety. Naturally, the industry’s first reaction is caution.

But here’s the turning point; these problems are *manageable* if addressed proactively.

Reframing biofuels from “imposed problem” to “operationally controllable fuel”

Here is our question: Can mitigating the physical challenges remove the tension and resistance to biofuel adoption?

We think so, and suggest a three-pronged approach:

1. Treat biofuels as a new fuel class itself, not a drop-in equivalent

The biggest mistake is assuming biofuel blends behave like fossil fuels with a green label. They don’t! Biofuels require:

- revised storage protocols
- proactive fuel conditioning
- more frequent monitoring
- updated maintenance expectations

This isn’t a failure of biofuels; it’s simply the reality of dealing with different fuel chemistry.

2. Shift from reactive firefighting to preventative measures

Waiting for filters to clog or tanks to gather sludge is expensive and disruptive when things go wrong. Instead, operators can adopt a preventative approach including:

- conditioning fuels at the point of bunkering
- stabilising them during storage
- ensuring compatibility with onboard systems
- monitoring oxidation and water content

This will reduce the operational “fear factor” dramatically.

3. Use technology to mitigate the physical problems with biofuels.

This isn’t about coping with biofuels, it’s about mastering them!

If shipowners want to remove the problem factor from biofuels, the most effective, simplestep is improving their stability and behaviour before they ever reach the engine.

Fuel conditioners like **Sulnox Eco** give operators a way to do exactly that.

Reframing biofuels from “imposed problem” to “operationally controllable fuel”

By enhancing the physical properties of biofuel blends, **Sulnox Eco** can help to reduce the problems that make shipowners wary:

- **Improved oxidative stability.**
  Reduces gum formation and slows degradation, extending storage life.
- **Improved lubricity.**
  Reduces wear on parts and reduced corrosion by forming a protective layer.
- **Better water management through emulsification.**
  Reduces the risk of microbial growth and corrosion.
- **Cleaner, more complete combustion.**
  Helps offset some of the efficiency losses associated with biofuel blends.
- **Reduced sludge and deposits.**
  Keeps tanks, filters, and injectors cleaner, lowering maintenance costs.

The strategic advantage and why early adopters will win

The industry is moving fast. Regulators are setting lower emissions standards. Biofuels aren’t a choice anymore, but how you handle them absolutely is your choice.

Shipowners who get ahead of the curve will:

- reduce compliance risk
- improve vessel reliability under new fuel regimes
- avoid costly downtime from fuel related failures
- strengthen their commercial position with greener, more reliable fleets

Ready or not, the transition to biofuels is unavoidable. It may feel imposed, inconvenient, and full of technical challenges but the adoption is happening.

The operators who thrive will be those who start mastering the tools that make biofuels reliable.

To discuss how to manage biofuels reliably in your operation,
contact info@sulnoxgroup.com