

# Participant Guide

## Module

# 6

## Fire Fighting Foam Principles

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### ***Module Objective***

Upon the completion of this module, participants should be able to develop firefighting strategies and foam-use tactics for controlling and fighting fires associated with flammable liquid hazards of ethanol-blended fuels.

### ***Enabling Objectives***

1. Describe the manner in which foam applications can be used to fight fuel fires.
2. List the ways in which foam applications suppress fire.
3. Predict when to fight fuel fires and when to simply protect surrounding areas.
4. State the generally accepted “rule of thumb” for the use of foam applications on ethanol-blended fuel fires.

## **Introduction**

As discussed previously, we have seen a tremendous growth of the ethanol industry and it will continue to expand. As always, emergency responders should be ready for emergencies associated with flammable liquids. Ethanol-blended fuels are similar to other flammable liquids and their hazards. The predominate danger from ethanol emergencies is not from incidents involving cars and trucks running on ethanol-blended fuel, but instead from cargo tank trucks and rail tank cars carrying large amounts of ethanol, manufacturing facilities, and storage facilities. Responders need to anticipate large-scale emergencies and where appropriate engage in operational activities using the most effective techniques and extinguishing media. This module will focus on foam basics and then foam applied specifically to ethanol-related emergencies.

In this program it is recommend to us AR-AFFF foam. Please note that fire protection foams have changed composition in recent year due to health and environmental effects of the older fluorinated foams. A new formulation know as Fluorine Free Foams is now being manufactured. It is recommended that you consult the safety data sheet (SDS) for your current foam supply and use caution if using older foams. For more information on per and polyfluoroaklyl substance (PFAS) or perfluorooctane acid (PFOA) please visit <https://www.epa.gov/pfas>.

## **Basic Foam Principles**

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### **What is Foam?**

As defined in National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 11, low-expansion foam is: “...an aggregate of air-filled bubbles formed from aqueous solutions which are lower in density than flammable liquids. It is used principally to form a cohesive floating blanket on flammable and combustible liquids and prevents or extinguishes fire by excluding air and cooling the fuel. It also prevents re-ignition by suppressing formation of flammable vapors. It has the property of adhering to surfaces, which provides a degree of exposure protection from adjacent fires.”

### **What is Foam Concentrate?**

“...a concentrated liquid foaming agent as received from the manufacturer.” (NFPA 11 version 2016)

## **What is Alcohol Resistant Foam Concentrate?**

“...a concentrate used for fighting fires on water soluble materials and other fuels destructive to regular....foams.” (NFPA 11 version 2016)

## **Why Use Foam?**

Ethanol will continue to burn at five parts water to one-part ethanol (5:1 ratio/500% dilution). Many extinguishing agents are effective on flammable liquids. However, foam is the only agent capable of suppressing vapors and providing visible proof of security. Reasons to use foam include:

- Foam can provide protection from flammable liquids for fire and rescue personnel during emergency operations when properly applied and maintained.
- A foam blanket on an unignited spill can prevent a fire.
- The suppression of vapors prevents them from finding an ignition source.
- Foam can provide post-fire security by protecting the hazard until it can be secured or removed.

## **How Foam Works**

Foam can control and extinguish flammable liquid fires in a number of ways. Foam can:

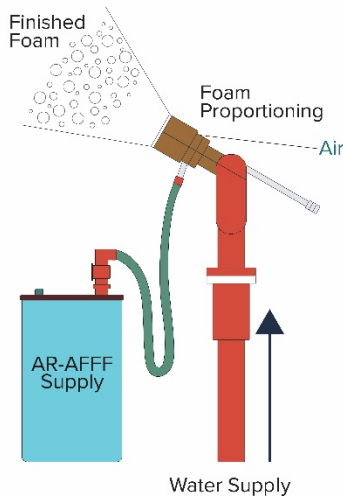
- Exclude oxygen from the fuel vapors and thus prevent a flammable mixture
- Cool the fuel surface with the water content of the foam
- Prevent the release of flammable vapors from the fuel surface
- Emulsify the fuel (some environmental foams)

## **Foam Tetrahedron**

Foams used today are primarily of the mechanical type. This means that before being used, they must be proportioned (mixed with water) and aerated (mixed with air).

Four elements are necessary to produce a quality foam blanket. These elements include:

- Foam concentrate (AFFF, AR-AFFF, etc.)
- Water
- Air
- Aeration (mechanical agitation)



All of these elements must be combined properly to produce a quality finished foam blanket. If any of these elements are missing or are not properly proportioned, the result is a poor-quality foam or no foam at all.

This training program is focused on ethanol-blended fuels and the foam of choice is AR-AFFF.

### **What is Foam Not Effective On?**

Foam is not effective on all types of fires. Therefore, it is important to know the type of fire and the fuel involved in every incident. Foam is not effective on:

- Class C (electrical) fires
- Three-dimensional fires
- Pressurized gases
- Class D (combustible metal) fires.

### **Foam is Not Effective on Class C Electrical Fires**

Class C fires involve energized electrical equipment; water conducts electricity. Since foam contains 94-97% water, it is not safe for use on this type of fire. In some cases, foam concentrate is even more conductive than water. Class C fires can be extinguished using nonconductive extinguishing agents such as a dry chemical, carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), or halon. The safest procedure for this type of situation is to de-energize the equipment if possible and treat it as a Class A (ordinary combustible material) or Class B (flammable/ combustible liquids) fire.

### **Foam is Not Effective on Three-Dimensional Fires**

A three-dimensional fire is a liquid-fuel fire in which the fuel is being discharged from an elevated or pressurized source, creating a pool of fuel on a lower surface. Foam is not effective at controlling three-dimensional flowing fires. It is recommended that firefighters control a three-dimensional flowing fire by first controlling the spill fire; then they may extinguish the flowing fire using a dry chemical agent.

## **Foam is Not Effective on Pressurized Gases**

Foam is not effective on fires involving pressurized gases. These materials are usually stored as liquids but are normally vapor at ambient temperature. The vapor pressure of these types of fuels is too high for foam to be effective. To be effective, foam must set up as a two-dimensional blanket on top of a pooled liquid. Examples of pressurized gases include:

- Acetylene
- Butane
- Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG)
- Propane
- Vinyl chloride

## **Foam is Not Effective on Combustible Metals**

Class D fires involve combustible metals such as aluminum, magnesium, titanium, sodium, and potassium. Combustible metals usually react with water; therefore, foam is not an effective extinguishing agent. Fires involving combustible metals require specialized techniques and extinguishing agents that have been developed to deal with these types of fires. A Class D extinguisher or a Class D powder is the recommended choice for fires involving combustible metals.

## **What is Foam Effective On?**

Foam is effective at suppressing vapors and extinguishing Class B fires. Class B fires are defined as fires involving flammable or combustible liquids. For the purposes of this discussion, Class B products are divided into two categories: hydrocarbons and polar solvents.

### **Hydrocarbons**

Most hydrocarbons are byproducts of crude oil or have been extracted from vegetable fiber. Hydrocarbons for liquid fuels have a specific gravity of less than 1.0 and therefore float on water. Examples of these include:

- Gasoline
- Diesel
- Jet propellant (JP4)
- Heptane
- Kerosene
- Naphtha

### **Polar Solvents**

Polar solvent fuels will mix with water with varying degrees of attraction for the water. For example, acetone has a stronger affinity for water than does rubbing alcohol. Polar solvent fuels are usually destructive to foams designed for use on hydrocarbons. Specially formulated foams have been developed for use on polar solvents. Some examples of polar solvent fuels include:

- Ketones
- Esters
- Alcohol including ethyl-alcohol (ethanol)

- Amine
- Methyl tertiary-butyl ether (MTBE)
- Acetone

NEVER mix AR-AFFF foam concentrates from different manufacturers. These concentrates are proprietary blends and may counteract each other when mixed in concentrate form. Finished foam (foam concentrate properly proportioned with water and aerated to allow expansion to manufacturer's recommendations) from different manufacturers being deployed into or adjacent to the same location is acceptable.

## Foam Terminology

Before discussing the types of foam and the foam making process, it is important to understand the following terms:

- *Foam concentrate* is the liquid substance purchased from a manufacturer in a container, pail, drum, or tote
- *Foam solution* is the mixture obtained when foam concentrate is proportioned (mixed) with water prior to the addition of air
- *Finished foam* is obtained by adding air to foam solution through either entrainment or mechanical agitation

## Types of Foam

Several foam types have been developed over the years, each with particular qualities:

- *Protein foam*, one of the earliest foams, is produced by the hydrolysis of protein material such as animal hoof and horn. Stabilizers and inhibitors are added to prevent corrosion, resist bacterial decomposition, and control viscosity.
- *Fluoroprotein* foams are formed by the addition to protein foam of special fluorochemical surfactants that reduce the surface tension of the protein-based concentrate and allow more fluid movement.
- *Aqueous Film-Forming Foam* (AFFF) replaces protein-based foams with synthetic foaming agents added to fluorochemical surfactants. Designed for rapid knockdown, AFFFs sacrifice heat resistance and long-term stability.
- *Film-Forming Fluoroprotein Foam* (FFFP) is a protein-based foam with the more advanced fluorochemical surfactants of AFFF. FFFPs combine the burn back resistance of fluoroprotein foam with the knockdown power of AFFF.
- *Alcohol-Resistant (AR) foam* is a combination of synthetic stabilizers, foaming agents, fluorochemicals, and synthetic polymers designed for use on polar solvents. The chemical makeup of these foams prevents the polar solvents from destroying them. Today's more modern AR foams can be used on both polar solvents and hydrocarbons.

This link is a visual explanation of the value of AR-AFFF foam concentrate - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LMFkwovkWH8>

Foam will remove heat at a faster rate than it is released, separate the fuel from the oxidizing agent, dilute the vapor-phase concentration of the fuel and/ or oxidizing agent below that necessary for combustion, and terminate the chemical chain-reaction sequence.

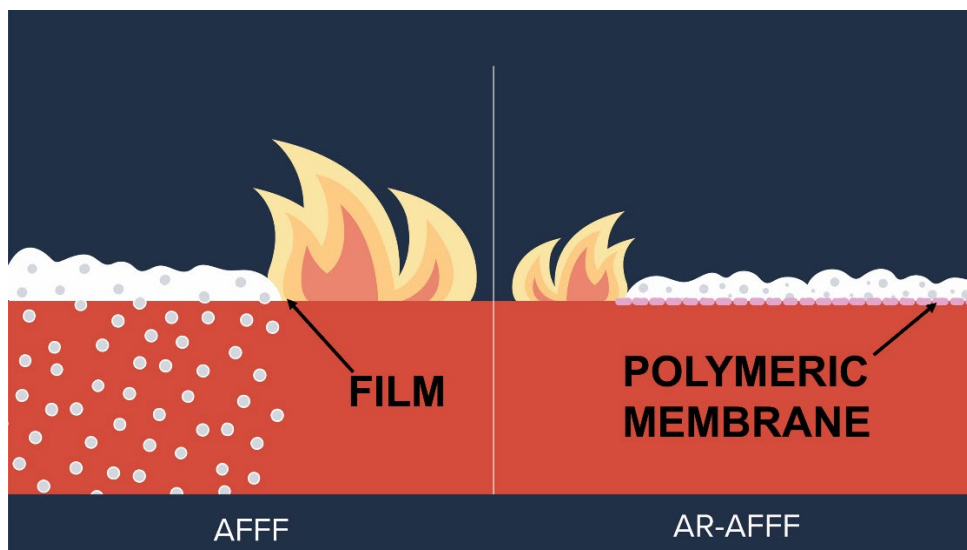
AFFF type of foam lowers surface tension, will rapidly spread across the surface, has a high burn back resistance and has quick knockdown.

AFFF finished foam when applied or exposed to a water miscible fuel such as ethanol and ethanol-blended fuels is immediately attacked. The ethanol, having a greater affinity for water than the hydrocarbon it may be blended with, will aggressively mix with the water present in the AFFF finished foam, effectively collapsing and destroying the foam's capabilities suppress vapors and/or extinguish a fire. The left side of the graphic in this slide is visually representing this scenario.

AR-AFFF finished foam includes a polymeric membrane which is released when applied on ethanol and ethanol-blended fuel incidents. The initial application of the AR-AFFF finished foam is attacked and sacrificed by the ethanol as mentioned before, but as additional AR-AFFF finished foam is continuously applied the polymeric membrane develops a layer on the surface of the ethanol or ethanol-blended fuel and becomes impenetrable for further ethanol attack.

Continued application of the AR-AFFF finished foam will ultimately establish a satisfactory depth and complete coverage of the spilled or burning ethanol to suppress vapors, cool the fuel, break up the uncontrolled chain reaction of fire and stabilize the incident.

All this is possible because the polymeric membrane prevented further destruction of the AR-AFFF finished foam as depicted in the graphic on the right side of the slide.



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F\\_HMe-aOp7A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_HMe-aOp7A) is a video emphasizing the positive attributes of AR-AFFF associated with the graphic in this slide.

## Why Use Alcohol Resistant (AR) foam?

Alcohol Resistant (AR) foam is the only agent that can extinguish an ethanol or ethanol-blended fuel fire, suppressing vapors and providing visible proof of security. The foam blanket on an unignited spill can prevent the spill from catching fire. The AR foam suppresses the vapors and prevents them from finding an ignition source. The foams polymeric membrane will prevent the ethanol from mixing with the water element of finished foam. AR foam also provides protection from flammable liquids for fire and rescue personnel during emergency operations.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYEzHfEaH98&t=4s> is a video emphasizing what a polymeric membrane looks like.

## Foam Characteristics

No single foam product performs the same for all classes of fires. Each foam type excels at different functions; however, performance in other areas is often diminished. Knockdown, heat resistance, fuel tolerance, vapor suppression, and alcohol tolerance are all characteristics of various foam types. Each property is explained in the text that follows.

- **Knockdown** is the speed at which foam spreads across the surface of a fuel. Quick knockdown is achieved by allowing the solution contained in the bubbles to spread rapidly across the fuel surface. Extremely quick knockdown sacrifices good post-fire security, which is required for a stable, long-lasting foam blanket.
- **Heat Resistance** Heat resistance is the ability of a foam bubble to withstand direct flame impingement or contact with elevated temperature surfaces, with little or no destruction to the foam bubble. The heat resistance of a foam blanket is often called “burn back resistance”.
- **Fuel Tolerance** is the ability of the foam to enter the fuel and resurface with little or no pick-up of fuel within the structure of the bubble. A foam bubble which picks up fuel while submerged would simply carry the fuel to the surface and feed the fire.
- **Vapor Suppression** Vapor suppression is the ability of the foam blanket to suppress flammable vapors and prevent their release. Vapor suppression is necessary to extinguish fires involving flammable liquids and to prevent ignition of unignited flammable liquid spills.
- **Alcohol Tolerance** is the ability of the foam blanket to create a polymeric barrier between the fuel and the foam, thus preventing the absorption of the water from the foam bubbles. This absorption would result in the destruction of the foam blanket.

| Property                 | Protein   | Fluoroprotein | AFFF      | FFFP | AR-AFFF   |
|--------------------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|------|-----------|
| <b>Knockdown</b>         | Fair      | Good          | Excellent | Good | Excellent |
| <b>Heat Resistance</b>   | Excellent | Excellent     | Fair      | Good | Good      |
| <b>Fuel Tolerance</b>    | Fair      | Excellent     | Moderate  | Good | Good      |
| <b>Vapor Suppression</b> | Excellent | Excellent     | Good      | Good | Good      |
| <b>Alcohol Tolerance</b> | None      | None          | None      | None | Excellent |
| Source: National Foam    |           |               |           |      |           |

## Foam Proportioning and Delivery Systems

The effectiveness of foam depends on proper proportioning and the ability to deliver finished foam to the spill or fire.

### Concentration Levels

Foams are applied at various concentration levels depending on the fuel involved and the concentrate being used. Typically for *hydrocarbons*, foam is proportioned at 3%: that is three parts foam concentrate to ninety-seven parts water. For *polar solvents*, foam is usually proportioned at 6%: that is six parts foam concentrate to ninety-four parts water. Some concentrates allow for proportioning at 1% on hydrocarbons.

### Foam Proportioning Systems

A number of ways exist to proportion foam. These include:

- Line eductors
- Self-educting nozzles
- Pressure systems
- Pump proportioning systems

This section will discuss the most common proportioning systems: line eductors and foam nozzle proportioners (foam nozzles with pickup tubes).

## Eductors

Eductors use the Venturi Principle to pull foam into the water stream. The flow of water under pressure and velocity past an orifice or opening creates a vacuum or negative pressure that draws the concentrate through the metering valve. The metering valve controls the amount of concentrate allowed to flow into the water stream. The ball check valve prevents water from flowing back into the pickup tube and the concentrate container. Major elements of the eductor setup include foam concentrate supply, water supply, eductor arrangement, metering valve, pickup tube, and foam solution discharge. Two common types of eductors are in-line eductors and bypass eductors.

### In-Line Eductors

In-line eductors are some of the least expensive and simplest pieces of proportioning equipment available (see Figures 6.1 and 6.2 in Participant Guide). For this reason, they are perhaps the most common type of foam proportioner used in the fire service. Some advantages include:

- Low cost
- Minimal maintenance
- Simple operation

**Figure 6.1: In-Line Eductor**

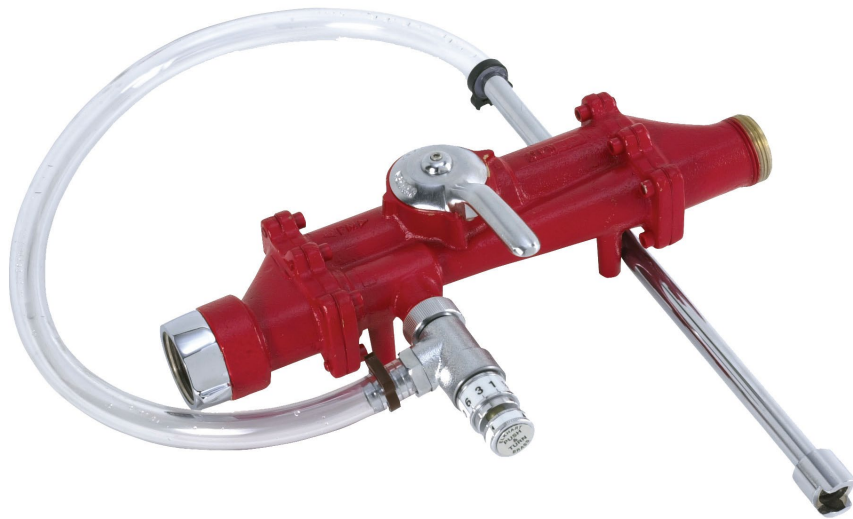




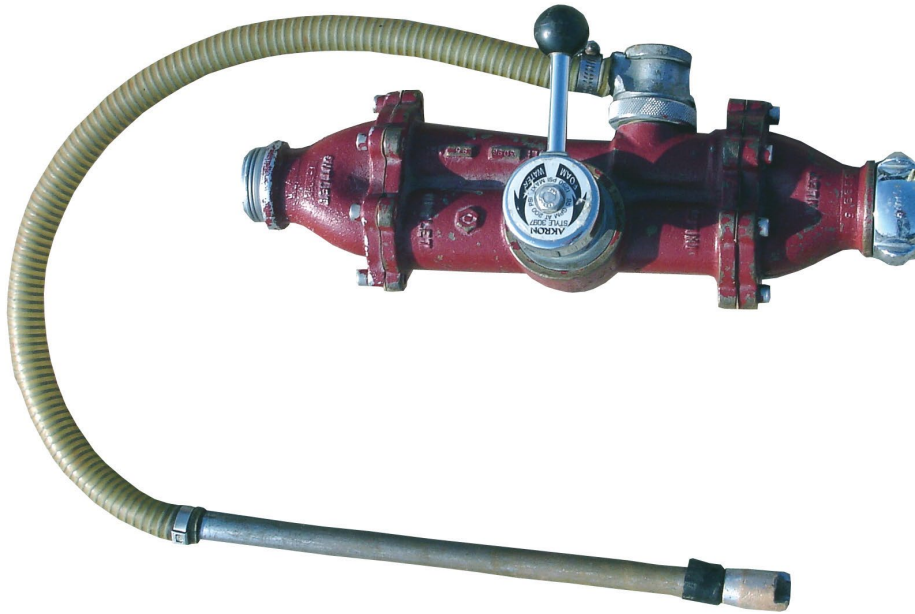
### **Bypass Eductors**

Bypass eductors (see Figures 6.3 and 6.4 in the Participant Guide) differ in that they have a ball valve to divert flow from foam to just water, allowing time for cooling without wasting foam and with less flow restriction.

**Figure 6.3: Bypass Eductor**



**Figure 6.4: Bypass Indicator**



### **Common Eductor Failures**

The most common causes for eductor failure include:

- Mismatched eductor and nozzle
- Air leaks in the pickup tube
- Improper flushing after use
- Kinked discharge hoseline
- Improper nozzle elevation
- Too much hose between eductor and nozzle
- Incorrectly set nozzle flow

These may be eliminated by careful preparation, inspection, and use of the eductor, nozzle, and hose. Other eductor failures may be caused by:

- Incorrect inlet pressure to educator
- Partially closed nozzle shutoff
- Collapsed or obstructed pickup tube
- A pickup tube which is too long

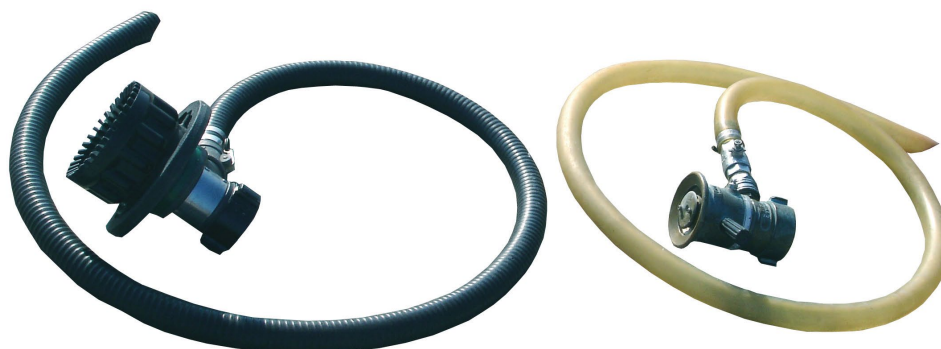
### **Foam Nozzles**

Foam nozzles are either foam proportioning, air aspirating, or non-air aspirating.

## Foam Proportioning Nozzles

Foam proportioning nozzles (see Figure 6.5 in the Participant Guide) have built-in orifice plates and utilize the Venturi Principle of operation, producing a very effective foam. These monitor nozzles have the ability to deliver significant volumes of finished foam. Due to the insignificant pressure drop across the eductor, they are able to project foam over long distances.

**Figure 6.5: Foam Proportioning Nozzles with Air-Aspirator**



Advantages of foam proportioning nozzles include:

- They are easy to operate
- They are easy to clean
- There are no moving parts
- There is no additional foam equipment needed

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## Hydrant with Foam Nozzle

Some bulk storage and ethanol production facilities have engineered, and professionally designed fire protection systems installed. As depicted in the PowerPoint presentation (Module 6, slide 18), by the flip of a switch in the “foam pump house” or when activated by a detection device this nozzle is automatically provided the appropriate amount of water at the required pressure.

It is incumbent upon emergency responders, facility owners and operators to understand the design, capabilities, and limitations of these specific systems.

In this instance, this may be a self-proportioning master stream foam nozzle that has a foam concentrate pick-up tube directly attached. Note that the coupling on the pick-up tube is specifically designed to be attached to a foam concentrate tote or similar container which has a quick coupling connection.

As part of the pre-planning process, emergency responders, facility owners and operators need to understand the resource needs to support a long-term foam operation for this foam nozzle and all others present at the bulk storage or production facility.

For example, if we assume this nozzle has a flow capacity of 1,000 gallons per minute (gpm) and the AR-AFFF foam concentrate we are using requires a 3% proportioning for ethanol-blended fuels, then this nozzle consumes 30 gallons of foam concentrate every minute.

A long-term foam operation could easily last for 2 hours and well beyond. The AR-AFFF foam concentrate needed to support the use of this nozzle just for 2 hours is 3,600 gallons.

### **Air Aspirating Nozzles**

Air aspirating nozzles are foam generating nozzles that mix air and atmospheric pressure with foam solution (see Figure 6.6 in the Participant Guide). These nozzles produce an expansion ratio of between 8:1 and 10:1 and produce a good-quality, low-expansion foam.

**Figure 6.6: Air Aspirating Nozzles**



### **Non-Air Aspirating Nozzles**

Fog nozzles are an example of non-air aspirating nozzles (see Figure 6.7 in the Participant Guide). Non-air aspirating nozzles produce an expansion ratio of between 3:1 and 5:1. This expansion ratio is not as good as that of air aspirating nozzles, but these nozzles often add some versatility which can be beneficial in various fire attack situations. Versatility includes the ability to switch from a foam solution to water in order to protect personnel and provide area cooling. Air aspirating nozzles do not offer this advantage.

**Figure 6.7: Non-Air Aspirating Nozzles**



A disadvantage of aspirating and non-air aspirating nozzles is that you must have additional equipment in order to generate foam. In addition, the gallonage setting on the nozzle must match the set flow for the eductor. It is important to understand the benefits of both types of nozzles in order to select the most appropriate one for the specific incident encountered.

### **Foam Trailer**

The image shown in the PowerPoint presentation (Module 6, slide 20) shows a portable foam trailers may be found at certain fire departments, local facilities for example airports and also stationed at major railroad facilities along principle routes. This specific trailer is equipped with 1,000 gpm self educting foam nozzle, an air aspirated and non –air aspirated nozzles and two totes of AR-AFFF.

### **Specialized Foam Nozzle**

The images shown in the PowerPoint presentation (Module 6, slide 21) represent typical specialized foam firefighting equipment that may be in use by emergency service providers, bulk storage and/ or ethanol production facilities with their own fire brigades. In addition, private contractors who specialize in flammable and combustible liquid firefighting may have larger capacity and inventory available to them based on the scope and magnitude of any given ethanol-blended fuel incident.

### **Application Techniques**

Proper application is critical for foam. The key to foam application is to apply the foam as gently as possible to minimize agitation of the fuel and creation of additional vapors. The most important thing to remember is to ***never plunge the foam directly into the fuel.***

- ***Bounce-off*** - The bounce-off method is effective if there is an object in or behind the spill area. The foam stream can be directed at the object, which will break the force of the stream, allowing the foam to gently flow onto the fuel surface.
- ***Bank-in*** - When no obstacles exist to bounce the foam off, firefighters should attempt to roll the foam onto the fire. By hitting the ground in front of the fire, the foam will pile up increasing in depth and as the angle of nozzle in relation to the ground is decreased the velocity and direction of the foam stream will push or roll the blanket of foam into the spill area as firefighters move forward.
- ***Rain-down*** - An alternative application technique is the rain-down method. The nozzle is elevated and falls over or rained onto the spill as gently as possible.

**Remember! *Never* plunge a stream of foam *directly* into fuel!**

*This is the end of the section that is the property of TEEX.*

The images shown in the PowerPoint presentation (Module 6, slide 23) are of actual application methods and approach as explained in the previous slide. The first three images are showing the bank-in or roll-on method. The picture in the lower right corner depicts the rain-down method of foam application.

The most important factor to consider when using AR-AFFF finished foam on an ethanol-blended fuel incident is to apply the foam AS GENTLY AS POSSIBLE to your spill or fire. Proper application choice and technique will minimize AR-AFFF finished foam degradation, reduce risk to operational personnel and increase potential for successful management of the incident.

### ***Foam for Ethanol and Ethanol-Fuel Blends***

Some of the foams mentioned in the previous sections have been around for over fifty years and have proven to be very effective on hydrocarbon fuels. However, these foams were not developed for application on ethanol-blended fuels and are simply ineffective.

This is because the alcohol or ethanol content of the blended fuel literally attacks the foam solution, absorbing the water component of the foam solution into the ethanol-blended fuel. Foam that is designed to be alcohol resistant forms a non-permeable membrane between the foam blanket and the alcohol-type fuel. It is crucial that these AR foams are used in combating ethanol-blended fuel fires, including E10. This is an important point.

Additionally, to be effective, these foams must be applied gently to the surface of the alcohol- or ethanol-blended fuels. Otherwise, the foam is absorbed into the fuel and will not resurface to form an encapsulating blanket.

Extensive testing done at the Ansul Fire Technology Center indicated that even at low-level blends of ethanol with gasoline, such as E10, there is a major effect on foam performance. The testing also indicated that with high-level blends of ethanol with gasoline, even AR foams required careful application methodology and techniques to control fires, suppress vapors, and stabilize the incident.

Using the proper foam and application technique will also reduce the risk to emergency responders and possibly increase the time before re-application of the finished foam is required to maintain incident stabilization.

AR-type foams must be applied to ethanol fires using Type II gentle application techniques. For responding emergency services, this will mean directing the foam stream onto a vertical surface and allowing it to run down onto the fuel. Direct application to the fuel surface will likely be ineffective unless the fuel depth is very shallow (i.e., 0.25 inches or less).

Type III application (fixed and handline nozzle application) is prone to failure in ethanol-blended fuels of any substantial depth. The only time it is effective is when it is deflected off surfaces, such as tank walls, to create a gentle style application.

It has also been determined that even with indirect foam application techniques it may require substantial increases in flow rates to accomplish extinguishments.

Therefore, in situations where AR foam cannot be applied indirectly by deflection of the foam off tank walls or other surfaces or there is no built-in application device to provide gentle application, the best option may be to protect surrounding exposures.

### ***Foam Recommendations for Fire Departments***

Departments that are subject to incidents involving the various ethanol-blended fuels found on highway incidents or at storage facilities should strongly consider converting to AR-AFFF foam concentrates or develop a means of having a cache of AR-AFFF foam readily available. When purchasing foam, ensure it is Underwriters Laboratory (UL) certified to remain compliant with NFPA standards.

Significant amounts of AR foam may be required for successful incident management. If your emergency response plan involves relying on mutual aid, and mutual aid assets, be sure to confirm what type of aid will be provided, what firefighting resources are available and what type of foam concentrate is being used.

The mixing of different brands of foam can potentially hinder the desired outcome and efficiency anticipated in which to be performed. It is imperative that departments verify the compatibility of the foams with their mutual aid partners. Also be sure to train emergency responders to use these assets.

### ***Foam Application Rates***

AFFF-type foams require approximately 1 gallon per minute (gpm) foam solution flow for every 10 square feet of burning surface on a hydrocarbon-type fuel. Ethanol-blended fuels require approximately double that flow (2 gpm/ 10 square feet) of an AR-type foam solution.

As with all types of foam, mixing percentage, application rate and flow rate are dependent upon the type and design of the foam concentrate. It is important to refer to the foam manufacturers recommendations.

## ***Alcohol Resistant Foam Facts***

There are quite a few new foam concentrates on the market that are challenging the fire protection standards for flammable and combustible liquids to include ethanol-blended fuels. As new testing and certification methods are adopted and approved by organizations such as NFPA (National Fire Protection Association) and UL (Underwriters Laboratories) it is absolutely critical that organizations and agencies purchase foam concentrates from reputable manufacturers.

These globally recognized foam concentrate manufacturers have tested their foam products to these industry standards and the foam concentrates PASSED these tests. UL-162 is currently an industry standard relating to foam concentrate performance on ethanol and ethanol-blended fuels. Foam concentrate manufacturers will more than likely include their UL-162 certification within the product documentation and be visible on the foam concentrate container.

Keep in mind that alcohol resistant (AR) foams are effective on both alcohol and hydrocarbon fires. AR foams have a special polymer that forms a protective membrane between the fuel and the foam as it contacts the polar fuel, making fire extinguishment possible. AR foams also make the foam more stable and heat tolerant, resulting in better burn back resistance when compared to conventional foams.

As a matter of fact, some of the AR foams have quicker knockdown abilities and longer foam retention times than some of the traditional protein-based hydrocarbon foams. **It is recommended that a thermal imaging camera be used to more accurately determine if a fire is completely extinguished, especially during daylight hours.**

All foam concentrates have a shelf life and will deteriorate over time. Shelf life can exceed 20 years if the foam concentrates are properly managed and maintained in a suitable storage environment according to manufacturer's requirements.

In addition, to keep the particulates or critical ingredients of the foam in suspension and mixed, a maintenance program must be developed whereby the foam concentrate is re-agitated and rotated periodically. Foam concentrate manufacturers typically require a concentrate sample to be taken and tested on an annual basis to ensure the integrity of their product.

If a department has a specific hazard that only involves non-alcohol or non-ethanol-blended fuels, they may want to consider non-AR foam for that specific hazard. For ethanol production, transportation and retail fuel station related incidents emergency response agencies should have AR foam readily available.

## ***Ethanol Scene Evaluation***

Proper scene evaluation will assist in making the right choices for a successful incident management and mitigation. Benchmarks that need to be considered are:

- Size-up
- Situation report to include addressing life safety issues and/or
- Evacuate impacted areas
- Establish Unified Command
- Establish hot, warm and cold zones
- Protect exposures
- Deny entry
- Assemble resources to engage in mitigation activities in staging area
- Be sure to use the application rate recommended for ethanol
- AR-AFFF is the foam of choice

Keep in mind that AR foams are effective on both alcohol fires and hydrocarbon fires. Regardless of the type of incident, scope or magnitude, emergency responders adhere to the universal professional benchmarks of Life Safety, Incident Stabilization and Property Conservation (LIP) which ultimately lead to recovery activities.

At every incident, some type of management process must be initiated to “organize the chaos.” This incident management system (ICS) becomes even more important when the nature of these incidents increases in complexity, geography and as mentioned before scope, magnitude and involving multiple response organizations with statutory responsibility and/ or functional capabilities.

Within the concept of the incident management system, standardized benchmarks need to be addressed at every single ethanol-blended fuel incident. This will ensure the health, safety and welfare of the emergency responders and impacted community. Additionally, the benchmarks noted above ensures that the incident management process is initiated and that objectives are developed.

Strategies or solutions to achieve the objectives are identified, and resources (human and equipment) with the appropriate knowledge, skills and abilities are assigned to perform the work necessary to achieve the specific incident objectives and universal benchmarks previously discussed.

Finally, the intent of this information is to assist emergency responders following the ICS management process to arrive at an educated conclusion on whether their specific incident is going to become offensive or defensive in nature.

\*Please note that offensive operations involving the use AR-AFFF foam, specialized foam fire firefighting equipment and personnel may not always be the best strategy or solutions for every ethanol-blended fuel incident.

## ***Application Formula***

To determine the amount of foam concentrate required, you must find out the type of fuel and the area of involvement. The square footage multiplied by the application rate will give the recommended gpm. The whole formula will give the concentrate total, this includes the time duration for the attack and percentage rate for the concentrate to be used. As a note, double the amount of foam concentrate on hand prior to initiating fire attack (covers fire attack and maintaining foam blanket following knockdown). Time duration depends on the nature of the incident. Typical times are 60 minutes for tanks and 20 minutes for ground spills for hydrocarbon only based incidents.

\*Foam calculations courtesy of Williams Fire and Hazard Control.

## ***Application Rates***

Application rates recommended for ethanol spill fires of shallow depth follow NFPA 11. Increasing the foam application rate over the minimum recommendation will generally reduce the time required for extinguishment.

NFPA recommended application rate for hydrocarbon only based incidents with film-forming type foams equals 0.1 gpm (foam solution) per square foot of identified surface area with a minimum finished foam flow time of 15 minutes.

For ethanol-blended fuel incidents of any kind, flow times are based on specific manufacturer recommendations as well as the application rate which will be at least doubled to 0.2 gpm/ sqft of surface area identified within the incident.

# Quick Foam Flow

## Worksheet

1. Determine Area of hazard  
(LxW) or (.785 D<sup>2</sup>)

=

SQ FT

2. Choose Application Rate

=

.2  
GPM / SQ FT

3.

SQ FT

X

GPM

=

SQ FT

4.

GPM  
Flow Rate of Solution

X

%  
% of FLC

=

Gallons  
Gallons of FLC Per/Minute

5.

Gallons  
Gallons of FLC Per/Minute

X

Minutes  
Duration of Flow

=

Gallons  
Total FLC Required

Examples of application rates for ethanol-blended fuels:

For ethanol-blended fuel incidents the application time is based on the recommendations from the manufacturer of the foam and the type of foam that will be used.

An area of 2,000 square feet of ethanol-blended fuel is burning. You have universal plus 3%/ 6% foam available for securing the flame.

- 0.20 gpm/ sqft X 2,000 sqft = 400 gpm of foam solution required.
- 0.03 X 400 gpm = 12 gallons of 3% concentrate required per minute.
- 12 gallon X 30 minutes = 360 gallons of 3% AFFF concentrate required to control, extinguish and initially secure a 2,000 sqft ethanol-blended fuel fire.

Application rate calculations tell you more than just “How much foam do I need?”; they also tell you what hardware, tools, appliances and even possibly what application technique may prove most effective based on the incident specifics such as weather and terrain.

## Application Rates

This chart shows the GPM requirements.

| Area<br>(Square Feet) | X | Minimum Application Rate              | = | GPM<br>Solution |
|-----------------------|---|---------------------------------------|---|-----------------|
|                       | X | 0.10 Hydrocarbon Liquid Spill/ Fire   | = |                 |
|                       | X | 0.16 Tank Dia.<150'                   | = |                 |
|                       | X | 0.18 Tank Dia.<200'                   | = |                 |
|                       | X | 0.20 Tank Dia.<250'                   | = |                 |
|                       | X | <b>0.20 Polar Solvent Spill/ Fire</b> | = |                 |

This specific form provides resource need guidance as part of a detailed pre-plan for any flammable/ combustible liquid bulk storage facility, ethanol or hydrocarbon production facility bulk storage and large scale above ground storage tanks at a retail facility.

NOTE that the recommended application rates or densities indicated are for hydrocarbon fuels. The RED highlighted information is a starting point for ethanol-blended fuels. Current methodology indicates that greater application rates or densities are required as tank diameter increases.

Emergency response organizations with statutory responsibilities or functional capabilities should work closely with owners and operators of these facilities during pre-plan development. It is highly encouraged to tank advantage of fire protection engineers and other nationally recognized private contractors who engage in ethanol-blended fuel incidents of scope and magnitude when calculating resource needs to include AR-AFFF foam concentrate needs, water supply and specialized foam firefighting equipment.

This chart shows the concentrate requirements.

| GPM<br>Solution | X | % of Foam<br>Concentrate | = | Foam<br>Concentrate<br>GPM | X<br>(Time)             | Total<br>Concentrate<br>(Gal) |
|-----------------|---|--------------------------|---|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
|                 | X |                          | = |                            | 20 Min.<br>(Spill/Fire) |                               |
|                 | X |                          | = |                            | 60 Min.<br>(Tank Fire)  |                               |

Remember that due to the characteristics of ethanol and ethanol-blended fuels additional resources and time may be required to achieve incident objectives and manage the incident safely.

| Total Concentrate<br>(Gallons) | X 2 | Incident Foam Needs Prior to Initiating Fire<br>Attack |
|--------------------------------|-----|--------------------------------------------------------|
|                                | X2  |                                                        |
|                                | X2  |                                                        |

Incident foam needs rule of thumb is to double the amount of foam concentrate on hand prior to initiating fire attack (covers fire attack & maintaining foam blanket following knockdown).

### **Summary**

AR foam is accepted as the best fire suppression/ firefighting agent for use in incidents involving hydrocarbons and ethanol-blended fuels.

Because of its ability to develop a protective polymeric membrane layer when applied on ethanol-blended fuels, AR-AFFF foam turned out to be the best choice for incidents involving these types of fuel.

Because AR-AFFF foam also works well on gasoline fires, it is the recommended choice for all fuel fires involving either gasoline or ethanol-blended fuels.

If it is unclear the chemical nature of the burning fuel, AR-AFFF is the preferred choice from a response standpoint. Refer to the foam manufacturer for the recommended application rate.