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April Safety Message - Refueling Alert

Serious problems continue to be reported around the country related to unsafe refueling practices. To date it is reported that over 150 serious incidents have occurred , and they seem to be on the increase. The main problem is a general lack of awareness of the existence of static electricity buildup, which can ignite gasoline fuel vapors.

Static electricity can build up when a motorist exits or re-enters a vehicle during fueling. If the motorist has not discharged this static electricity by touching their vehicle at a good grounding point, then upon touching a grounding point near the fueling area a spark may cause a flash fire or small sustained fire with the gasoline vapors in the area. Another source for dangerous static electricity buildup is in the use of plastic fuel containers [such as when a person is getting several gallons of gasoline for their lawn mower], if the container is left in the car trunk, or in the back of a pick-up truck during the filling process. In those locations the fuel container often does not have sufficient grounding to "wick off" the accumulating static electricity. And the metal fuel nozzle can cause a spark when it contacts a part of the container, causing combustion.

The most effective means by which a motorist can avoid static electricity problems at the gas pump is to stay outside the vehicle during the entire refueling operation. Getting in and out of the vehicle is a common cause of the static buildup. And if this is done the person should be sure to ground themselves properly and at a distance from the fuel vapors that are pouring invisibly out of the fuel tank. This is done by touching a bare metal part of the vehicle or pumps with a bare hand. Additionally one must always keep a portable fuel container on the ground when it is being filled with gasoline, to avoid static buildup.

In the event that one experiences a fire while refueling, it is very important to leave the nozzle in the fill pipe of the vehicle, and get away from it. Immediately notify the station attendant to shut off the dispensing devices, and pumps with the emergency controls. Leaving the pump nozzle in the vehicle fill pipe will cause the least amount of damage.

The American Petroleum Institute and the Petroleum Equipment Institute have provided the following guidelines:

1. Turn off your vehicle engine while refueling. Put the vehicle into park and/or set the emergency brake. Turn off any auxiliary sources of ignition , such as a camper cooking unit.
2. Do not smoke or light matches or lighters around the pump area.
3. Don't jam the nozzle to keep it open during refueling.
4. Don't re-enter the vehicle during refueling.
5. Be careful to avoid over-filling, in order to avoid spilled fuel.
6. Avoid prolonged breathing of fuel vapors.
7. Use only approved portable fuel containers [never glass, for example] and keep them on the ground when filling them.
8. Manually fill portable containers, and do it slowly to avoid spills and build-up of static electricity.
9. Fill a portable container no more than 95% full in order to allow for expansion.
10. Do not use containers that do not have a tight-fitting cap.
11. When transporting portable fuel containers make sure no spilled liquid fuel is on the sides [let it evaporate]; secure it from tipping or sliding; and don't leave it for long in direct sunlight or in a closed car trunk.
12. Never siphon gasoline by mouth; and if any fuel is allowed into your mouth or swallowed contact a physician immediately.
13. Never use gasoline to clean your hands or other objects.
14. Turn off cell phones, pagers, and other such devices on your person. Someone calling you can cause a spark that will ignite fuel vapors.
15. Observe where the nearest fire extinguisher is whenever you are using fuel.