

FIRE LINE:
Static Electricity – Gasoline Pump Fires
Safe Handling of Gasoline
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By Deputy Fire Chief Scott Hopkins

For many of us, gasoline is such an integral part of our everyday routine we sometimes forget it is a highly combustible liquid – safe when dispensed properly, but extremely dangerous when handled carelessly or inattentively.

You know how it happens at home. Walking on carpet creates a static charge that sparks when you touch something metal. The same thing can happen at the gas pump. Drivers, who slide back into the seat while waiting for the tank to fill, create static electricity, which may spark when they reach for the nozzle again - and could create the spark that causes a flash fire.

It is true, static electricity-related flash fires at the gas pump are rare. Americans pump gasoline into their cars an estimated 11 to 12 billion times a year, generally without incident. Nevertheless, be cautious. Though rare, and occur more frequently in cool dry weather, they can happen any time of the year, to anyone. Only 175 cases have been reported since 1992, with 78 percent of these to women.

Cell phones are not responsible. An article by the Petroleum Equipment Institute (PEI) states there is not single documented incident that was caused by a cellular telephone. Though untrue, cell phones continue to be cited as causing fires at the pump in e-mails circulating on the Internet. In fact, many researchers have tried to ignite fuel vapors with a cell phone and failed.

PEI, and the Sturgis Fire department, recommends not using any electronic device that might distract the motorist during the refueling process.

Here are some tips to help you stay safe when refueling:

- Turn off your engine
- Don't smoke
- Don't get back in your vehicle while refueling
- If you must get back into your vehicle touch something metal, like the door handle, before returning to the pump

To learn more about refueling safety, please visit: www.pei.org/static.

General gasoline safety tips include:

- Keep in approved container away from any heat source
- Store gasoline at room temperature, but never in a residence
- Keep container closed tightly
- Never clean car parts with gasoline
- Do Not smoke or light matches where gas is handled or stored
- Keep out of the reach of children
- Refuel lawn mowers and power equipment out doors, only when motor is cool and no more than 95% full to allow for expansion
- Never mix gasoline and kerosene
- When refilling container place it on the ground, do not fill in a trunk or a bed of a pickup truck
- Keep the nozzle in contact with the container and fill slowly
- For long term storage use a fuel stabilizer

If you have any other questions concerning refueling or use of gasoline, please call the Sturgis Fire Department at 659-7257.