

## September 2004 - Staying Safe at the Gas Pump

There are a rash of e-mails circulating on the Web warning that cell phones can and have triggered fires at gas pumps. There are even reports being circulated on the Web of individuals suffering severe burns when cell phones ignited fires at gas stations. Both the Cellular Telecommunications & Internet Association and the Petroleum Equipment Institute report that they have not found a case where a cell phone was responsible for igniting any gasoline or gas fumes at a gas station. It's all an urban legend. The cell phone gas station scare is nothing more than an Internet hoax according to the two parties.

Although there are no confirmed reports of fires so far, Ericsson and other makers have advised users to turn off cell phones near combustible materials, and many gas stations warn against using cell phones at their pumps. This is a good practice to adopt until this potential problem is better understood.

If neither industry has ever officially linked cell phones to gas station fires, why is the urban legend so rampant? Robert Renkes, a spokesman for the Petroleum Equipment Institute has noticed in the e-mail rumors, a link between cell phone use and static electricity. Cell phone use, he said, does not cause fires, but in rare circumstances a static discharge can create a spark at the gas pump. Static electricity is proven to be dangerous around gas pumps.

There are 150 documented cases nationwide of gas pump fires from static electricity. Primarily the motorists getting back in their vehicles while fueling cause the static build-up. The charge is picked-up from the cars' seats. When the motorist exits the vehicle and touches the metal part of the pump nozzle they can discharge the built up static electricity. This link <http://www.gawda.org/gasfireclip.avi> will show you an actual video of such a static caused fire. \*

A study by Robert Renkes of the 150 cases of these fires has produced the following results:

- Almost all cases involved the person getting back in their vehicle while the nozzle was still discharging gas. When finished, they went back to pull the nozzle out and the fire started, as a result of static.
- Most of the victims had on rubber-soled shoes.
- Most of the victims were women, since they have more of a tendency to get back in their vehicles while fueling.
- An arc caused the fires from a static charge igniting gasoline vapors.
- Some of the fires have resulted in extensive damage to the vehicles, to the stations, and have caused severe injuries to the customers.
- Seventeen of the 150-recorded fires occurred before, during or immediately after the gas cap was removed and before fueling began.

**Stress the following points:**

**1. You should never get back into your vehicle while filling it with gasoline.**

**2. If you have to get in your vehicle while refueling, make sure you touch a metal part of the door before removing the gas nozzle. This will discharge the static from your body before you get near the gas nozzle.**

I suggest that you share this information with your family. This is especially important to those families that have children that could be in the car while an adult is pumping gas.