

Do Not Top Off! New Oregon regulations prohibit topping off or overfilling vehicle gas tanks at the pump

On December 12, 2008, Oregon's Environmental Quality Commission adopted gasoline vapor recovery regulations to reduce benzene and other forms of toxic air pollution from gasoline dispensing operations. Benzene is a known carcinogen that is present in unhealthy levels in many Oregon communities - it far exceeds public health benchmarks in most of the counties in our state. One reason this is true is because the gasoline in Oregon and the Northwest comes from Alaska's North Slope which produces characteristically higher benzene gasoline than other areas. In addition, benzene is loosely regulated in the Pacific Northwest compared to other parts of the nation.

The new **No Top Off** regulation implements federal hazardous air pollutant requirements that mandate gasoline spill prevention. Prohibiting topping off ensures compliance with the federal regulations and safeguards public health. Controlling gasoline vapors will reduce toxic exposures at and near service stations and in communities with numerous gasoline facilities. It will also help Oregon continue to meet stricter federal ozone (smog) standards and prevent the waste of millions of dollars of gasoline.

Topping off or overfilling vehicle gas tanks is a long-standing practice misperceived by many as beneficial, when it actually causes numerous problems. In the vast majority of vehicles fueled in Oregon, the tank is full when the nozzle automatically clicks off. Continuing to pump gas after this point causes fuel to back up into the pump nozzle, the vehicle's fuel system and the gas pump hoses. This results in frequent drips and spills when the nozzle is removed from the vehicle gas tank and also when the nozzle is handled to fuel the next vehicle.

Each ounce of spilled gasoline emits benzene pollution in an amount equivalent to a car being driven 56 miles.

The DEQ observed that about half of the risk from benzene at service stations is centered around the pump islands and caused by fuel drips and spills. Because fuel is handled so frequently at the pumps, drips and spills concentrate benzene in a location where workers, drivers, and passengers, including children, will breathe it. This exposure is avoidable through improved gasoline handling practices.

DEQ is aware that the new prohibition on topping off vehicles involves a period of learning and behavior change, both for businesses and customers. Gas stations are required to post signs at their pumps instructing attendants and other persons pumping fuel not to top off.

It is important to understand that the vapor recovery regulations do not prevent customers from getting a full tank of gas - if attendants can confirm that a vehicle tank is not full after the click off, then they may continue to dispense fuel using best judgment and caution to prevent excess fuel delivery or a spill.

For more information see:

The Healthy Air Oregon website www.healthyairoregon.org (a project of Oregon Toxics Alliance)

The Department of Environmental Quality website on air toxics:
<http://www.deq.state.or.us/aq/permit/vapor/vapor.htm>