

Wireless Device Use at Gas Stations: Is It Safe or Not?

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A question was posed at the July 2013 Southern Weights and Measures Association regional breakout meeting at the National Conference on Weights and Measures in Louisville, KY regarding the safety of using wireless devices at gas stations. This is an issue that has been debated and investigated for more than a decade, particularly with the ever increasing rise in wireless device use throughout our society. As a result, virtually everyone with a wireless device has given this some thought, and rightfully so.

In the late 1990s, there were reports of explosions in other countries (China, Australia and others) allegedly set off by sparks generated from wireless devices (cell phones in these particular cases). Over the next few years, such reports were also published in the media from various states throughout our country. These reports generally were published shortly after an incident occurred; however, after a thorough investigation regarding the source of the explosion, which can take time, other sources (than wireless devices) were declared as the ignition source in each case. However, these reports perpetuated the concern.

While no substantial evidence existed to confirm these suspicions, cellular and petroleum companies nonetheless issued warnings as a precaution, which resulted in many user's guides and motor fuel dispenser signs recommending turning off such devices before fueling. Despite being the responsible approach from these industries to help safeguard their customers from this perceived potential threat (although not yet documented), it furthered the concern amongst the motoring and mobile device using public.

Such reports and actions though prompted scientific studies conducted by various interest groups, which would ultimately lead to the conclusion that there has not been an established link between wireless phones and the ignition of fuel vapors. Investigations were conducted by well-known investigative teams such as Myth Busters and articles were written by on-line investigative groups such as snopes.com. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has also stated that there is no evidence that such reports are true.

In the marketplace today, you will still see artifacts of these seemingly outdated concerns in the form of warning decals on certain motor fuel dispensers or maybe even in the user guides of various wireless devices. However, you will now also see 'encouragement' to use these devices at certain facilities in the form of numbers to call inside for assistance to rewards programs and even QR codes; all posted on motor fuel dispensers.

At the end of the day, regardless of any study or report, you should always abide by any warnings or signs posted in your user's guides or at the gas stations where you fill your vehicle, or at any location for that matter, just to be safe.

References:

1. Federal Communications Commission at <http://www.fcc.gov/guides/wireless-phones-gas-stations>
2. Snopes.com at <http://www.snopes.com/autos/hazards/gasvapor.asp> and references therein.

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