

Drive Off Thefts

Many gasoline retailers are reporting an increase in gasoline theft, or "drive-offs," with the higher gasoline prices. The increase in these drive-offs has not gone unnoticed by the media - several newspapers and television stations have reported an increase in drive-offs in the past year.

You may get a call from the media to discuss the issue. As always, feel free to refer them to Florida Petroleum Marketers and Convenience Store Association Communications

Department – 800-523-9166 or email: fpma@fpma.org to answer questions. You can refer the media member to the Library Section of www.fpma.org where Drive Off press release, talking points, Florida Drive Off law information is available 24/7. This information may be helpful to you if you want to talk to the media or even customers about Drive-Offs.



FPMA suggest the following Key Points to use when discussing drive-offs with the media.

FPMA uses the following Key Point to develop the main message and support it with two or three proof points. For broadcast, messages become the "soundbites." You are most likely to get your messages aired if they can be delivered in less than 25 seconds.

In developing messages and proof points, we focus on:

- Keeping them simple – remember you are speaking to the public, which had no working knowledge of the drive off issues and how they affect their neighborhood convenience store.
- Avoiding technical jargon, acronyms, industry terms or too many statistics
- Bridging a reporter's question to a key message

Bridging is a technique for reversing a negative question into an opportunity for positive message points. For example, if the reporter asks "Since gasoline prices are higher, aren't you making more money and able to sustain more drive-offs?" A bridging technique would be to respond, "*No business can afford to have more and more of its merchandise stolen and expect to stay in business. Gasoline thefts are now costing our convenience store business \$xxxx/month-and that's money that we will never recover. Shop lifting affects the costs all consumers pay – weather it is blue jeans that are being shop lifted or gasoline – the end results is still the same – it hurts all consumers.*"

Terminology

In discussing the positioning of this crime, it is stronger to use the term "gasoline theft" than drive-off. In addition, the term "drive-off" may not be known, and therefore understood, by viewers. We reinforce this point with the reporters so they have the reporter explain the term in his/her opening script for the final piece. Still, our recommendation is to use the term gasoline theft because it more strongly implies the illegality of this activity.

Story Organization

It's most likely that the media will develop the story around this sequence:

- What's the problem?
- How is it impacting convenience store operators, who sell 60 percent of the gasoline in America?

- What are they doing about it?

SAMPLE MESSAGES

Q: What's The Problem?

A: Gasoline theft is on the rise.

Proof points:

1. We used to experience 2-3 gas thefts a week at each store; we're not experiencing 2-3 a day. (insert store statistics) NACS' 2000 *State of the Industry* report shows that drive-offs cost the industry \$234 million in 1999—more than \$2,600 per each store selling gas.
2. It's no longer just teenagers taking a few dollars for a thrill; it's now grown adults taking a tankful - which costs our business as much as \$50 when it's an SUV.
3. Many retailers are seeing more of it in metropolitan areas where there's a greater anonymity; everyone tends to know everyone in smaller communities.

Q: How Is It Impacting Your Business?

A: Gasoline theft makes a bad situation worse for our business.

Proof points:

1. Our wholesale costs are rising faster than we can recover them at the pump so our margins are down significantly.
2. Gasoline theft is on the rise and it's hitting us when the value of that stolen property is at an all-time high.
3. It's money out the door that we cannot recover or gets passed on to law-abiding customers.
4. In addition to the reduced profit margins on gasoline, retailers are finding that more customers are paying for their gasoline by credit card. The processing fees for credit cards are further shrinking already reduced margins to the point where some retailers are not making any money on gas sales.

Q: How Do Drive-Offs Impact Consumers?

A: Gas drive-offs also have a negative impact on customers.

Proof points:

1. Law-abiding customers must pay the cost of the theft in higher prices.
2. Some drive-offs leave the gas island at unsafe speeds to avoid being caught, creating a more dangerous environment.

Q: What are You Doing to Stop Gas Theft?

A: We're taking immediate steps to deter gasoline theft.

Proof points:

1. We're increasing sales associate training so our store employees more effectively monitor what's happening at the gasoline islands.
2. We're also redoubling efforts to greet all customers at the gas island. This takes away the anonymity.
3. We're installing cameras at stores so if people do steal, we will have it on tape and can work with law enforcement to prosecute thieves.
4. We're working with authorities to prosecute gas thieves. In 1999 Florida passed tighter laws punishing offenders and allowing a judge to suspend their drivers license if convicted of gasoline theft..

