

New gas stations get break from vapor recovery equipment

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New or rebuilt gas stations in New Jersey no longer have to install stage II vapor recovery systems to keep gasoline vapors from polluting the air, saving their owners about \$2,000 per pump.

It's not that the state Department of Environmental Protection is giving up on capturing the vapors and returning them to the tank during fill ups, according to a Nov. 18 advisory from the DEP.

But newer vehicles have onboard refueling vapor recovery systems of their own, said the DEP, making the ones at the pump redundant.

Sal Risalvato, executive director of the New Jersey Gasoline C-Store Automotive Association, said he has been working for several years to get the state to drop the requirement for the vapor recovery systems.

Many other states have already made the switch, he said, including nearby New York and Connecticut.

But he's afraid the new rules in New Jersey don't go far enough.

The DEP's order covers only new and completely rebuilt stations — those that are having all piping and underground tanks replaced.

Gas station owners who want to replace just their pumps won't be let off the hook for installing ones with vapor recovery, he said, until the state comes up with rules for how to decommission the underground parts of the systems. They use extra piping in the hose and down to the tank to push vapors back into it.

"The rules currently are the same for existing facilities," said DEP spokesman Bob Considine. "A new rule is being drafted that will require Stage 2 decommissioning at some facilities and allow it for all."

That decommissioning is likely to be expensive, Risalvato said, but will be worth it. Gas stations would then no longer have to maintain, inspect and test the systems regularly and face tough fines if they are not working properly.

"Decommissioning will not involve removing any tanks or product piping," said Considine. "But, in many cases, a contractor will have to dig beneath the dispensers to cap the vapor recovery line properly."

The new rules need to happen quickly, Risalvato said, to help owners avoid wasting a lot of money next year.

"We are in a situation next year, a lot of guys will be changing their (gasoline) dispensers" in order to become EMV compliant for paying at the pump with chip credit cards, Risalvato said.

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