



Gas Station Owners Ask Murphy to Allow Self-Service During Pandemic

Some attendants are already sick; social distancing is impossible at the pump; stations are cutting back hours or shutting down entirely

By: Tom Johnson, April 14, 2020

With gas stations closing as attendants quit because they're afraid of contracting COVID-19, a trade organization is asking the Murphy administration to lift temporarily the ban on self-service gasoline.

In a series of letters to Gov. Phil Murphy, the New Jersey Gasoline, C-Store, and Automotive Association is urging the state to allow self-service stations as a way of easing the staffing concerns and other issues its members are facing due to the outbreak of the coronavirus.

Attendants at gasoline stations — some of whom have already tested positive for the coronavirus — are walking off their jobs. Owners are trimming back how long the stations are open. Some owners are worried that if the pandemic persists they may end up closing their stations permanently, according to Sal Risalvato, executive director of the association.

No social distancing at the pump

Not only are gas attendants worried about keeping the recommended six-foot social distance while interacting with customers, but also Risalvato argues many motorists have the same concern. Some have asked attendants to let them pump their own gas; others refuse to allow attendants to even touch their credit cards, he said.

So far, his pleas have been ignored by the governor's office, although Murphy tweeted at the end of March, "We have no plans to turn our gas stations into self-service at this time."

New Jersey is the only remaining state that does not allow motorists to pump their own gas. Oregon lifted the ban on self-service in the western part of the state. Late in March,

due to the coronavirus outbreak, self-service was extended to the entire state by its governor.

For owners, the impact of the outbreak in New Jersey is not only undermining sales, but forcing them to cut back hours when they are open, or in some instances close stations entirely.

Shuffling attendants

Kashmir Gill owns 70 different stations, all with various brands, across New Jersey. He had to shut down 12 of those stations because of worker defections, before he moved around his employees to allow him to reopen them. Instead of being open 24 hours, most now operate 12 to 14 hours, Gill said.

“Initially, it wasn’t a big deal,” Gill said, but when the outbreak took off in New York state, many of his employees began worrying about getting exposed to the virus and balked at working.

Self-service has been a political football in the state for more than six decades. Risalvato’s organization, formerly known as the New Jersey Gasoline Retailers Association, had been the chief roadblock to ending the ban.

In his letter to the governor, Risalvato emphasized he did not want the suspension to be permanent or mandatory, but simply allow customers to pump their own gas by sectioning off a separate island for motorists to feel more secure while practicing social distancing.