

SUMMER 2023



VOLUME 15 - ISSUE 3

ON THE ROAD

THE OFFICIAL COMMUNICATION OF THE NEW JERSEY GASOLINE C-STORE AUTOMOTIVE ASSOCIATION

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President's Message



Hello again, and welcome to summer. I hope you had a safe and happy 4th of July. Not much has changed since my last letter and we all seem to be facing a lot of the same issues. Gas prices, employee shortages, employee salaries, rising fees and insurances. Don't let these things get you down, there are still so

many opportunities out there. We here at NJGCA are still on the move making changes and charging forward. I recommend you all continue to do the same.

Our new **exclusive healthcare program** is presenting well, saving our members major dollars. If you haven't gotten a quote, I strongly recommend you do so quickly. It's money in your pocket and as we all know, every little bit counts. One quote I reviewed for a member showed a savings of over \$30K. That's right, 30 thousand dollars a year with basically the same coverage for their employees. Another new insurance program for garage liability through SPARK is showing great potential with yet more savings for our members. Please, reach out to us so we can connect you with the right folks to start saving \$\$\$.

We had previously sent out a questionnaire though the Road Warrior about our **New Education Program. Is anyone interested?** To date there have been no responses. Is this something you and your employees would like to see and participate in? Call me, call the office, email me or the office, your input is important and extremely helpful to us as we navigate new benefits for you, the membership. We work for you and want to give you the very best of opportunities.

On another note, we had our Member and MBP get-together in June at Tommy's Tavern in Clifton. Michelle, Nick, and Eric did a great job coordinating this event as all who attended will attest. It was a great evening to catch up with fellow members, exchange ideas and discuss the issues of day-to-day business. If you didn't get to participate, don't worry! **July 28th, Blue Claws minor league baseball game, Lakewood, NJ.** Food, games, fireworks and a gathering of NJGCA members. Bring your family, bring your employees. An evening to relax and share ideas and concerns with

your fellow colleagues and get to know the staff here at NJGCA. **There is NO fee, it's FREE, it's our way of thanking you, our members.** Seats are limited so please RSVP to the email blasts you have been receiving. Not to worry if you are unable to attend this game. We are doing it all over again **August 24th** with the **Somerset Patriots minor league team in Bridgewater.** We would love to see you there, come on out and enjoy an evening with us. Again, seats are limited, so please RSVP ASAP.

As always, the staff here at NJGCA are working diligently to improve communication and education along with monitoring the political climate of New Jersey. Our job is to serve you and assist you any way we can. Step up, get involved and participate. We want our members to be the best and have the best opportunities to move forward and excel. Enjoy your summer at the beach, on the boat, by the pool and remember to make this summer count! Till next time, be safe, healthy, prosperous and don't forget to count your blessings.

Joe Ocello, President NJGCA
848-333-9257
Email: Joe@njgca.org





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Visit www.njgca.org/baseball to register

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Board President
Member Liaison
joe@njgca.org



Meerafzal Fazaldin
Vice President
meer.fazaldin@earthlink.net



Kashmir Gill
kashmirgill@gillenergy.com



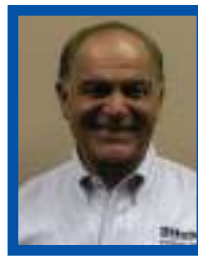
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Administrator,
Director of
Government
Affairs
eric@njgca.org



Lou Papale
Secretary
callou@netzero.net



Tim Arata
Treasurer
tim@njgca.org



Norman Lippmann
normanlippmann@gmail.com



Greg Cannon
Director of
Operations
greg@njgca.org



Salvatore Fiore
oatinc@aol.com



Thomas Sadowski
tesautocare@hotmail.com



Barney Linn
capemayriggins@gmail.com



Nick DePalma
Counsel &
Director of
Member Services
nick@njgca.org



Jesse Georgaklis
jesse@njgca.org



Daniel Holsten
holstenservice@aol.com

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Ebbie Ashabi
Saad Abbasi



Michelle Horowitz
Jackson
Director of
Communications &
Information
michelle@njgca.org

The legislature recently approved significant increases in campaign contribution limits. Raising more funds for our causes are more important than ever!



The NJGCA Political Action Committee (PAC) is one of our most important tools in fighting for our industries. With 120 legislators all looking for campaign support, and their events running \$400+ each, we need all the support we can get to stay relevant and stay in the conversation. When you contribute to the NJGCA PAC, you enable us to show support and say thank you to those legislators who have championed our efforts and stood by our side. Our contributions are small compared to those of our opponents, but legislators understand that our small contributions represent a giant effort to do our part to support them.

Even a \$100 donation will allow our association, and that means you and your business, to be more influential in Trenton. Money is support, and support is what gives us our foot in the door, makes us new friends, makes old friends stronger, and makes potential enemies think twice about trying to go after your business.

The strength of our association has always been our numbers, if everyone gives a little it will add up to a whole lot. You can make a contribution payable to NJGCA PAC and mail to 615 Hope Rd., Bldg. 2, 1st Floor, Eatontown NJ 07724.

MEMBERSHIP MEMO

By: Greg Cannon

Hello Everyone!



There really isn't a lot to share with you in this issue that wasn't already covered last time.

I do hope you're all well and enjoying the summer. It seems the dust has settled, and we're back to a better place. I'm sure you've noticed your association's efforts to

promote some fun and entertaining events to get you and your family out for some "ahhh time." We hope you like the choices and please take advantage of them, we're looking forward to seeing you.

We need members getting together. The best conversations and the most positive results for things sometimes occur when there's no agenda, or actually very little effort. Just being.

Your participation in these events will drive their success which will feed ideas for having future events. Have a suggestion for what we should do next? Give us a call or

send us an email.

That's it for now. Until next time we wish you a great summer.

Thank you for reading.

Cheers!

Greg



Peter Gudzak

Direct: 908-738-2011

Fax: 908-665-2638

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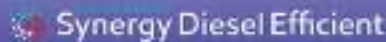
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Motor Fuel Market Analysis

By: Eric Blomgren



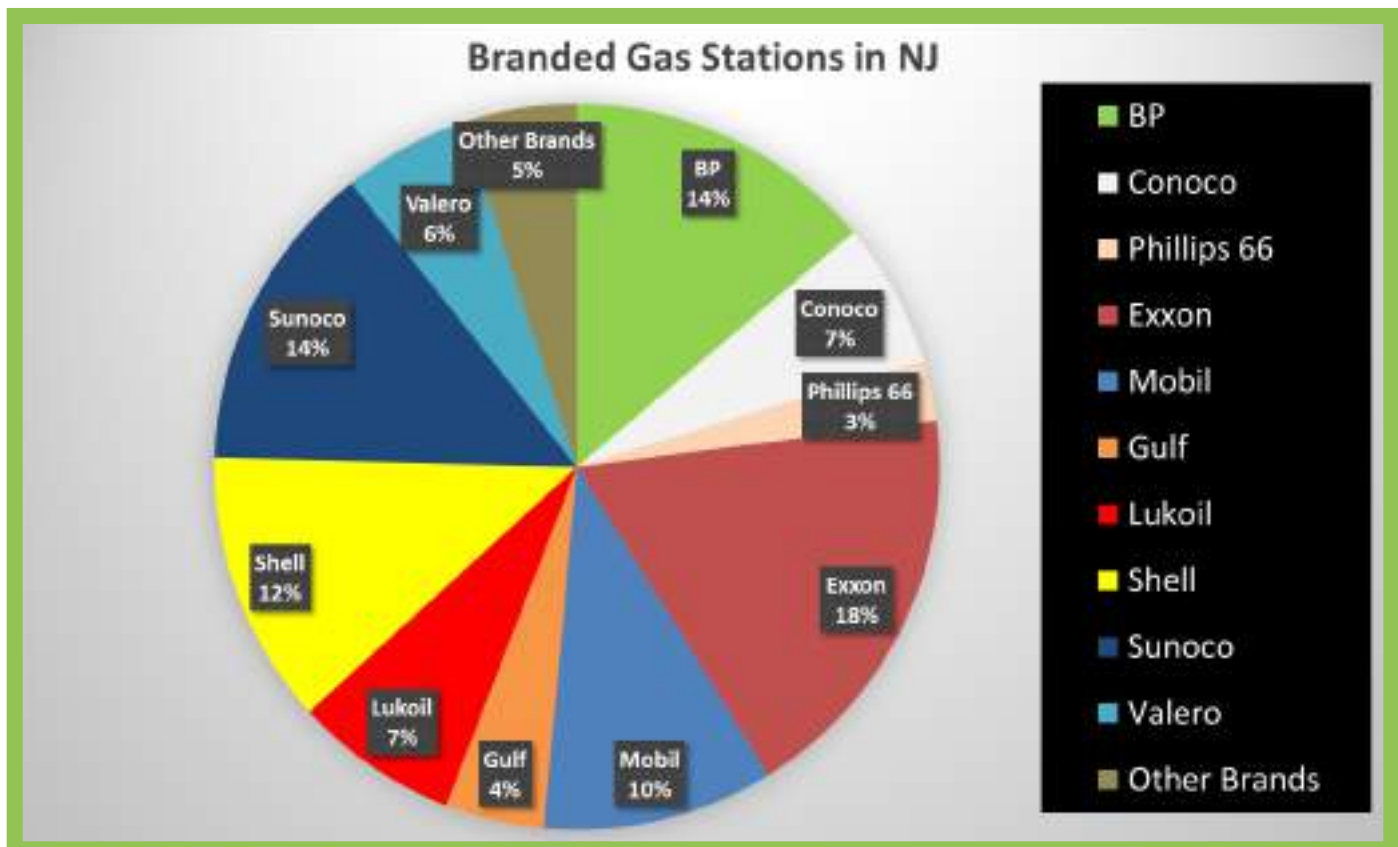
As part of larger research projects, I've been looking into the shape of the overall motor fuel retail marketplace in the state of New Jersey. Based mostly on data from the state, there are about 2,700 locations statewide selling gas to the public. About 400 of these are corporate operated sites—Wawa, Quickchek, Speedway, and the memberships clubs.

Of those 2,300 independent-owned locations, many remain smaller in size. Just 17% have five or more gasoline dispensers at their location (this is the threshold we have used in A-3105, the self-serve bill which would require only locations of this size to provide full-serve—though that percentage is closer to 30% when you include those corporate locations). 31% of these stations have just two dispensers.

We all know it's virtually impossible to stay open selling only fuel. Decades ago, almost all gas stations were service stations with auto repair as the accompanying business. Today, even among the non-corporate sites, service stations are about 42% of the marketplace, just about one thousand locations statewide. 7% of locations have both bays and a small convenience store, meaning that roughly half of gas stations are offering repairs. Some of the decline in that share is due to bays being converted to c-stores, some of it is due to businesses taking out their tanks and becoming repair-only. The US Census Bureau estimates there are about 2,600 standalone mechanical repair shops in the state, down from 3,000 twenty years ago. Convenience stores are also at about 42% of independent sites, and an additional 8% of locations only have a small kiosk to supplement fuel sales.

Branded vs Unbranded is one of the most important choices for a station owner. Around 36% of locations are unbranded, though nearly one third of them have chosen to label themselves as a Delta. Another popular name for unbrandeds is some variant of 'US Gas', particularly in South Jersey.

As you can see in the graph, Exxon is the most popular oil company brand in the state with nearly 18% of all branded locations, plus another 10% of locations fly the Mobil flag. Sunoco and BP are neck-and-neck after Exxon, with Shell close behind. Conoco and Phillips 66 are particularly concentrated in South Jersey, where they combine to make up about a quarter of all branded sites.



A photograph of a gas station at night, illuminated by overhead lights. The station has a blue canopy and several gas pumps. The background shows a dark sky and some trees.

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Legislative Roundup

Important Issues Affecting Your Business

By: Eric Blomgren

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In May, with our urging, S-3812/A-5523 were introduced in the Legislature, sponsored by Senators Pat Diegnan (D-Middlesex) and Jon Bramnick (R-Union) and Assemblymembers Reginald Atkins (D-Union) and Britnee Timberlake (D-Essex). This bill would help those dealers still stuck on dealer tank wagon pricing because their supplier owns their property. We have heard from multiple members that they are being charged on average 30¢ a gallon over rack for gas, and sometimes 50¢ a gallon when most station operators who own their property are paying 1¢ or 2¢ over rack. The attitude of their suppliers has been to dare the dealer to either file a lawsuit or walk away from the business they've built up. The core of the bill is to require that when the dealer does not control the property, the price they are charged by the supplier must be based on a formula agreed to between the contract parties. It also currently caps the price charged at 5¢ over rack. It does not apply to commissioned agents, and because of constitutional law it would only apply to newly agreed contracts going forward. If the bill became law, no longer would these (handful) of bad actors in the industry be able to take advantage of their dealers by charging literally whatever price they want and gouging the dealer and ultimately the public. If you are affected by this problem please make sure to reach out to me (Eric@njgca.org), we will need your stories to get lawmakers to care about this issue when the Legislature comes back at the end of the year.

Right to Repair

In mid-June we got some bad news in the fight for Right to Repair. Just as the Massachusetts law passed in 2020 was finally set to be enforced, which would have required auto manufacturers to make access to their vehicles' telematics data available to independent repairers, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) issued a letter telling manufacturers not to comply with the state law. They claim that allowing for this access would let hackers sabotage cars while they are on the road, and that therefore, federal safety law preempts state law. This is a surprising statement, since otherwise the Biden Administration has been publicly supportive of Right to Repair laws, including for autos, and their Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has said there is no evidence for these scary claims being made by the manufacturers. But now it seems the NHTSA

has bought into the manufacturers' propaganda. Many cybersecurity experts also disagree with this concern. Obviously this is very concerning regarding our own future efforts to fight for Right to Repair expansion in NJ. At the federal level, the Right to Repair bill in Congress is picking up support and additional cosponsors, including two from NJ—Josh Gottheimer (D-Bergen) and Chris Smith (R-Ocean).

Beer/Wine in C-Stores

The overall effort to reform our state's liquor license laws has run into headwinds caused by those who already have licenses. There was some hope that broad reforms would be passed as part of the annual budget process, but other than some legislation helping small breweries there was no progress on the issue, and there won't be before November at the earliest. We are still hoping that legislation we have drafted which would allow convenience stores to buy a permit to sell beer and wine products will be part of any future changes later this year. The liquor store owners, of course, have made clear they strongly oppose any change that would lead to them facing more competition.

Self-Serve

For decades New Jersey and Oregon have been the only two states to ban self-serve gasoline entirely. Oregon loosened their restrictions a few years ago to allow self-serve in the large rural eastern part of the state. In June their Legislature passed a bipartisan bill that legalized self-serve statewide, officially leaving New Jersey as the only place in the country without self-serve. Of course, in order to get a bill passed at



all in Oregon, it had to require that all stations offer full-serve at all times, that at least half of their pumps be dedicated to full-serve, and that there be no price difference between self

and full. You may recall that the New Jersey bill we pushed, A-3105, would allow stations with four or fewer gas dispensers to be only self-serve if they wished. Adopting the Oregon policy or something similar would certainly make it easier to pass a bill in Trenton, but it leaves the question of if it's worth the effort to wind up in situation in which every station

would still need to have an attendant present at all times. Please let me know your thoughts on this and potential steps forward by emailing me Eric@njgca.org

Cigarette Updates

In late June, the Senate Health Committee passed legislation to ban the sale of menthol cigarettes within the state of New Jersey. Menthols make up about 40% of all cigarettes sold. Only Massachusetts and California currently have menthol bans, and New York state recently

decided against enacting a ban. The federal government is still planning to enact a nationwide ban, likely taking effect in the next 18 months. A ban in just New



Jersey would hurt c-stores and the state budget, with little impact to the public health. People would be able to buy in Pennsylvania and New York, and no doubt there would be widespread illegal sales (as there has been with flavored vapes since that ban went into effect three years ago). NJGCA made this point to the committee alongside a wide variety of other opponents. After passing the Health Committee, it was added to the final Senate Budget Committee hearing with less than three hours notice. NJGCA was able to testify against it, the only group able to do so. We are hopeful that this bill will not move forward, but it could find itself on the agenda at the end of the year, especially now that it has passed all necessary committee hearings. One Senator, before voting for the bill, even stated he thought all cigarette sales should be made illegal.

Though New York decided against a menthol ban, they did increase their cigarette tax to \$5.35 a pack. With the NJ rate at \$2.70 a pack, there will be more pressure to increase the tax here. NJGCA is looking into the possibility of increasing the state minimum markup on cigarettes, which has been at 8% for decades. Massachusetts has the highest rate in the nation at 25%. This would lower cigarette sales in the state, and potentially the sales of other c-store items, but an increase that big would still leave small businesses coming out way ahead. What are your thoughts on a change like this? Email Eric@njgca.org

Internet Lottery

The state Lottery Commission still desires to move forward with their plan to sell lottery tickets directly to the public through the internet and mobile apps. This would only apply to draw games like MegaMillions and PowerBall, not to scratch off games. The Commission insists that it will not steal

customers from existing retailers, though we are skeptical. They are eyeing a rollout for late spring 2024. We are working with other allied groups against the plan, and a planned formal vote to approve it was pulled from the Commission's agenda at the last minute, placing the change in limbo for now.

Delta-8 Ban?

We have discussed Delta-8 in this magazine in the past, products that exist in a kind of gray market and are being sold at smoke shops and some c-stores. Delta-8 has been described as a kind of "diet" marijuana, made synthetically from legal hemp. Even though Delta-8 is technically legal, stores selling it may still be at risk of a lawsuit from unhappy customers, or they may be at risk of legal violations since many products labeled as Delta-8 actually contain illegal amounts of Delta-9. Now the Legislature is looking to ban the sale of these products entirely. The Assembly overwhelmingly passed a ban on June 30th, but the bill was not brought up in the Senate. It is however possible that the Governor may issue an Executive Order to ban these products, so keep a close eye on the issue. Should a ban go into effect, there is a strong



chance you may be stuck with these products and no way to return them or sell through existing stock. You may also want to keep an eye on a new trend called

tianeptine, an unapproved diet pill sold under brands like "Zaza", "Pegasus", and "Tianaa" but is being called 'gas station heroin' because of its highly addictive properties. It has been banned by at least eight states so far, and like 'bath salts' a decade ago could become illegal at any time. As always we recommend you rely on honest and professional distributors who will stand by every single product they sell you, like National Convenience Distributors (NCD).

Rewards Programs/Coupons

NJGCA was one of several business groups to testify against a new bill (A-5076) that would require any sort of coupon or discount that exists digitally to have some sort of physical way to redeem. It was designed for grocery stores, but it would apply to all forms of discounts at all retailers. For our members, we are particularly concerned how this might impact the rewards and loyalty programs that big brands create, such as the oil companies and franchised convenience stores like 7-Eleven. The discount programs these bigger companies develop are sometimes only offered digitally on the customer's phone. Our concern is whether now or in the future

if it becomes too burdensome for these companies' programs to comply with this bill they may just decide to not offer them in New Jersey. If nothing else, our direct advocacy was able to get the fines lowered from \$2,500 for a first-time violation to \$250. The bill passed the Assembly Consumer Affairs Committee and Senate Commerce Committee but did not progress further, and we are hopeful that if it does move in the fall, it will be further amended to protect rewards programs.

Catalytic Converter Thefts

On May 15th Governor Murphy signed into law a bill to try and reduce catalytic converter thefts in the state. As you likely know, this has become a nationwide



epidemic over the last few years, as thieves have realized they can quickly saw off converters and sell them for a quick and easy profit. The

rare minerals that make converters work (platinum, palladium, rhodium) have skyrocketed in value and are generally worth more per ounce than gold. NJGCA advocated for the bill to move forward and not be forgotten amongst the (literally) six thousand other pieces of legislation in Trenton. The new law prevents New Jersey scrap yards from buying converters unless they have the VIN of the vehicle it came from and either a copy of the registration, receipt from a repair, or bill of sale from the vehicle—unless the converter was bought from a legitimate repair shop. It also requires that no one purchase a used catalytic converter that is not attached to a vehicle unless they are a scrap yard—except if the seller is a repair shop.

ATV/Dirt bike Pumping Bans

In several urban areas of the state, there has been a very disruptive increase in people driving around city streets on ATVs and dirt bikes, often very unsafely. While police are fully empowered to confiscate these vehicles, apparently they have been incapable of solving the problem and now local officials are looking to force gas stations to solve it. Several municipal governments in the state have either enacted or are considering an ordinance that would ban gas stations from filling up ATVs or dirt bikes that are driven onto the property. Thankfully, they have included two important protections for retailers—one is that if the vehicle is driven in on a trailer, then it's fine to fill up. The other is that if an attendant feels threatened by the customer, they can serve them as long as they report the interaction to the local police. Newark, Jersey City, Paterson,

Atlantic City, and Belleville have or are planning to adopt these rules. In most cases local officials have reached out directly to local station owners to talk about this change. This is a reminder of the value of knowing at least some of your local officials so that you can directly work with them on issues like this, as most of the time these ordinances are not reported on by the media until after they have become law.

Fuel Pricing Study Committee

At the end of June, the Assembly unanimously passed S-2818, which creates a "Working Group to Study Pricing of Motor Fuels by Retail Dealers." This bill was introduced last year in the midst of the huge price spike caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The original language of the bill called for the committee to "recommend policies and practices the State can implement in response to price gouging by retail dealers." Working with our allies the Fuel Merchants Association, we spoke with the sponsor and explained that retailers are victims of high prices, not the people making them high, and we were able to get that language removed and replaced with "examine how competition and market conditions impact pricing practices." The bill heads to the Governor now after having passed unanimously. Assuming he signs it, we will of course work with this committee to make sure they understand just how hard it is for station owners to survive, and how prices are driven by upstream forces out of our control, as well as the ever increasing operating costs like labor and credit card fees.

Credit Card Surcharge Regulation

On June 30th both houses of the Legislature passed a bill to regulate credit card surcharges in certain cases. It is likely the Governor will sign it, and once he does it will go into effect immediately, so be aware of what the requirements are. The bill does not affect cash/credit pricing for motor fuels. It also does not affect cash discounting (when the advertised price is lowered when a customer pays in cash). The law requires that a surcharge not be higher than the actual cost to the seller to process the credit card payment. It also requires the seller to disclose the surcharge and the amount prior to the customer being charged by posting a sign at the point of entry and the point of sale.

FY 2024 State Budget

On June 30 the new state budget was signed into law by the Governor after it passed the Assembly 51-24 and the Senate 25-12. It spends \$54.3 billion for the new year (July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024), which is 7% higher than last year, and an increase of 56% from the last budget of Gov. Christie six years ago. Technically there are no tax increases included in this budget, but once again the Governor refused to dedicate any funds to the Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund, meaning once again employers will see an increase in payroll taxes as the fund continues to be refilled after the covid

shutdowns. The corporate business tax surcharge will expire at the end of the year as originally planned; this is the 11.5% tax rate for c-corporations with over \$1 million in net profits. It will fall to 9%, from the highest in the nation to the fourth highest. The ANCHOR program has been approved for another round of checks to homeowners and renters under the income cap, and a new program was created called StayNJ. This program will reimburse homeowners up to half of their property taxes, up to \$6,500. It only applies to seniors with an income under \$500,000. The big catch to the program is that the checks are not scheduled to go out until January 2026, which not coincidentally is also when a new Governor takes office, and there is speculation that a downturn in the budget and/or economy will lead to the program being cancelled.





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Follow us on our social media platforms and join in on the discussion today!

Gasoline Station Franchise Terminations – Can You Fight Back?

By: Marisa Rauchway & Mauro Tucci

It is the piece of paper that most franchisees dread – a letter from your franchisor that says it has decided to take away your rights to be a franchisee and that you must close your business.

As you read the letter, one question often races through your head – can I fight back? If you own a gas station, the answer is often YES.

A federal law, known as the Petroleum Marketing Practices Act (“PMPA”), generally prohibits a gasoline franchisor from terminating a franchisee unless the franchisor specifically bases its decision to terminate on at least one reason specified in the PMPA. If the franchisor relies on any reason not allowed by the PMPA, then the termination may be unenforceable.

For example, the PMPA provides that a gasoline supplier franchisor can, generally, terminate a franchisee for not complying with a “reasonable” and “materially significant” provision in the parties’ franchise agreement. Say, for instance, the franchisor attempted to terminate a franchisee for failure to comply with some minor term in the franchise agreement. The franchisee may be able to fight back against this termination, even if the actual language of the franchise agreement would otherwise allow the franchisor to shut down the franchisee’s business operations.

Under the PMPA, the timing of terminations is relevant and can result in an otherwise valid reason to terminate a franchisee being invalidated. This is because the PMPA’s notice requirements override any shortened period provided in a franchise agreement. The PMPA sets a clock on the franchisor to terminate a franchisee and, depending on the circumstances, requires the franchisor to act in very limited timeframes. Often, the franchisor must provide at least 90 days notice before a termination can become effective. Termination that does not comply with the PMPA’s timeframes can give the franchisee the ability to challenge the termination.

The PMPA also generally gives a gas station franchisee significant practical recourse in the face of a threatened termination that may be in violation of the PMPA. Specifically, the PMPA allows a franchisee to go into federal court to seek a preliminary injunction, which is to ask the court to effectively stop the franchisor from shutting down the franchise while the franchisee pursues a lawsuit against the franchisor. Obtaining a preliminary injunction is ordinarily difficult because the standard

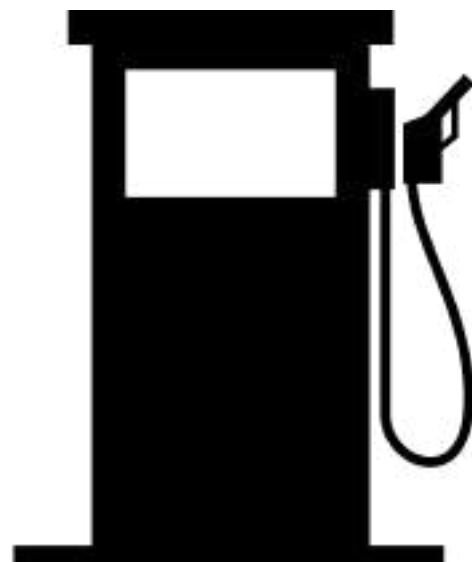
can be quite high. However, that is not necessarily the case for gasoline station franchisees.

The PMPA relaxes the typical standard for temporary injunctive relief. A franchisee is only required to show that (1) sufficiently serious questions going to the merits of the termination exist; and (2) the balance of hardships weighs in favor of keeping the franchise open during the lawsuit. Additionally, the PMPA permits a court to order the franchisor pay the franchisee its attorney fees for the lawsuit, if successful.

There are legal procedures that are specific to seeking relief under the PMPA. Notably, for New Jersey gas station locations, such owners can often run into New Jersey federal court, even if the franchise agreement specifically requires lawsuits to be filed in a different state. That said, the PMPA provides a one-year statute of limitations, meaning that franchisees must act in a relatively short amount of time if they feel that the franchisor has terminated their franchise rights wrongfully.

In sum, a termination notice from a franchisor is not necessarily the end of a gas station owner’s business. If you are faced with a franchise termination notice, you may be able to fight back, particularly with counsel knowledgeable of the PMPA’s protective provisions.

Marisa Rauchway and Mauro Tucci are members of Chiesa Shahinian & Giantomasi PC located in Roseland. Patricia Calderone assisted with this article.



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Mauro G. Tucci Jr.
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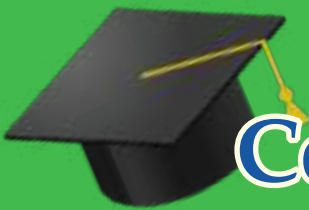
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973 530 2139 | mrauchway@csglaw.com

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Board Member Spotlight

Tom Sadowski: Sadowski Auto Care, North Arlington



By: Michelle Horowitz Jackson



How long have you been in Business?

More than I wish to say. I took over for my father in my early 20s when he made a career change. For decades, I managed a 24 hour Shell gas station, food mart, towing service, and auto repair

shop off a main highway into New York City.

In 2012, I decided to make a change in my life and get out of the gas business and do what I know best. I took my business and moved a mile down the road to a large location and became a very successful repair shop. I run it like a practice. We employ skilled and quality people, and have rigorous operations and procedures. Just recently, we changed our hours to Monday through Friday and closed the weekends. One of the best decisions I've made.

How did you begin getting involved with NJGCA? When/Why did you decided to get involved with our Board of Directors?

When I took over the Shell station, my father was already a member. I decided to also stay on. Once I moved to my new location, I continued my membership. Owning a small business in our industry has many challenges. NJGCA has been an asset to my success.

A few years ago I was asked to become a member of the board. Knowing how much help they were to me, I accepted. I like knowing that I will be helping and giving back by serving on the board.

What do you think is one of the biggest challenges our industry is facing today?

I think the biggest challenge for our industry is finding skilled labor. It's been tough trying to get knowledgeable people with skills that are also dependable. There's a lot of people out there but not all of them are what we're looking for. If you do find someone good, it's always best to continue on with training.

As an owner, I want to help my employees expand their skill set and reach the next level. I also keep them in the loop of business. Their feedback is always appreciated and taken into account on changes. I'm lucky to say if I ever do have to be out of the office, I can count on my staff to take ownership of their positions and take care of business.

Tom Sadowski
Owner
Sadowski Auto Care
586 Ridge Road
North Arlington, NJ 07031

Are you involved in any charitable organizations or community efforts that you would like members to know about? Is your business trying something different that other members could benefit from? Email Michelle at michelle@njgca.org today and let us know!





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Compliance Corner

*Compliance – Governance – Regulatory –
Administrative Updates*



By Nick De Palma, Counsel & Director of Member Services

MVC VIOLATIONS AND NOTES: ARE YOU TAKING PROPER PRECAUTIONS TO AVOID COSTLY FINES?

Over the last few months we have heard from a number of members with anecdotal feedback concerning their interactions with Motor Vehicle Commission (“MVC”) staff.

Often these encounters result in violations being issued to the Private Inspection Facility (“PIF”) shop owner and/or their vehicle emissions inspector (“INL”) employee.

While we are proud that our members are educated and better informed to avoid excessive fines and violations, even knowledgeable shop owners and inspectors can be periodically issued fines.

Lately we have heard from several members who were visited by an MVC “sting car” and issued violations. Most recently, the rash of catalytic converter thefts has prompted MVC sting car visits to issue violations to PIFs who fail to visually confirm that a vehicle has a catalytic converter installed when performing an emissions inspection. If you have not done so already, please remind all inspectors at your facility that sting cars are still actively engaging with the PIF community and handing out violations for failure to check for catalytic converters.

As a general reminder, please note that no one should rush through an inspection. This not only invites mistakes, but can land you in hot water with MVC if things go unchecked or skipped altogether. Why invite a possible fine or suspension?

What’s more, if you are overwhelmed at your facility on a given day, you should speak with your customers honestly and soothe any expectations. That often means giving them a realistic wait time estimate, and possibly asking them to come back another day. Schedule an appointment for them right there on the spot – that’s both good customer service and will also assuage any potential MVC undercover sting car visitors.

Lastly, don’t forget to regularly consult your manual and a checklist to remind yourself of proper procedures. Everyone gets distracted, especially when a shop is busy and phones are lighting up. Creating a resource for yourself to stay on task and prevent skipping over steps is appropriate and can prevent a fine later on.

Finally, here are a few various notes and suggestions (below) as well as a request for your insight on what you’re experiencing in the field.

1 – Please review your PIF and/or INL licensing expiration dates. We have heard from a handful of members who let their licenses lapse, and were later locked out of their inspection equipment. Though routine administrative tasks are seemingly trivial, they often create headaches if ignored. Knowing this, you should “calendar” all expiration dates and deadlines six months in advance to prevent any kind of interruption in your licensing. Trying to address this a day or two before expiration can be a logistical nightmare and should be avoided.

2 – If you are expanding your business to offer vehicle inspections, taking over a new location and wish to apply for a PIF license, or adding (or eliminating) a business partner to your shop, there are necessary administrative steps that must be taken to account for each scenario. These procedures can be difficult, with long lead times. If you need assistance, please let us know.

3 – Earlier this year, a change in law permitted MVC to provide motorists with digital proof of registration. The digital proof of registration allows a motorist the option to display their valid registration in a readily accessible format. A digital registration is a valid vehicle registration.

4 – Circling back to the introduction above, have you been visited by an MVC sting car? What was the outcome? If you’ve seen an uptick in your area or would like to share the experience, please feel free to reach out at your convenience.

Remember, when you are having difficulty with MVC, don’t forget that the Association is here to help. Every situation is unique, and while we cannot guarantee a specific result, we can often help improve an outcome once a violation has been issued (i.e. fines, loss of license, etc).

Please send your comments or questions to me at nick@njgca.org



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Security Measures, Part 1: Evaluating How to Protect Your Establishment, Guard Against Vulnerabilities

Taking time to make sure your security is up to snuff can save you problems and profitability.

By: Nick De Palma



Every small business owner is compelled to wear multiple hats. It comes with the territory, and it is unavoidable. This means you are forever switching between responsibilities.

At any given moment, you are the bookkeeper, appointment scheduler, marketing director, social media guru, customer service agent, human resources manager, IT technician – you name the role, and you’re juggling it as you simultaneously engage in your chosen profession.

All too often, our gaze is fixed on how the ordinary and routine can negatively impact your operations. That often comes in the way of sick employees, equipment failures, parts shortages, hardware purchases, or dependable workers who leave for new opportunities.

This daily grind is distracting and often pulls your focus away from other crucial areas that require thoughtful attention. One such area that is frequently overlooked (or taken for granted) relates to the physical and financial security of your business.

When one thinks about “security” it can conjure up many ideas. Perhaps you’re thinking of locks on your doors and bays, cameras under your awnings, or a safe to store cash and receipts in your office. But the truth is, the concept goes far beyond those limited applications.

Rather, when you think of securing your business, it must also speak to safety (of you, your employees, and customers), to fraud (electronic or otherwise), and to possible internal deception (from customers, suppliers, or even employees).

It may be hard to envision such circumstances, but it does not take much to imagine how a real-time emergency or ongoing veiled obstacles will hobble your operations and cut into your profitability. The logical extension of that mindset is that the things that we cannot anticipate may ultimately harm your shop.

No matter the type of security risk, it is always important to not only prioritize prevention, but be prepared for a possible prosecution. A solid security apparatus not only fosters deterrence and preemption, but is ultimately more “profitable” for owners once downtime, legal fees, lost profits, and

countless other considerations are factored in.

So, what are those obstacles? What does it mean for your business?

We break it down for you.

The Problem: Unsupervised Risks



Protecting your physical location seems like the most basic and obvious task to prioritize. The safety of you, your staff, customers, equipment, and location is necessary before you can engage in any business.

However, you can’t be everywhere at every moment keep track of things.

But what does this entail? Shouldn’t a basic building alarm and door locks be enough to ward off any possible theft or burglary?

The sad truth is that gas stations, convenience stores, and repair facilities are “easy targets” for many seeking to engage in wrongdoing. It’s clear why—our industry operates facilities that have historically dealt in a lot of cash, have extended- or late-working hours, and have plenty of foot traffic passing in and out quickly.

There is plenty of evidence to underscore this. Just read the news to see the headlines. Upsettingly, you don’t have to go back more than a few months to find some telling examples.

January 2023: In Bergen County, a single thief robbed FOUR service stations and convenience stores (in Paramus, Mahwah, and Fair Lawn) at gunpoint in a single evening.

February 2023: A service station employee was shot and critically injured in Lindenwold during an attempted robbery.

February 2023: An elderly convenience store attendant at a Fair Lawn service station was beaten and robbed.

February 2023: An armed robbery was committed at a station in Brick Township.

February 2023: Two armed robbers assaulted a station attendant and robbed a station in Bergenfield.

March 2023: Two men attempted to rob two gas stations in Kearny at gunpoint.

March 2023: A convenience store at a gas station was robbed in Hackensack.

April 2023: In Montclair, a convenience store at a service station was robbed by a criminal posing as a patron.

May 2023: Two gas stations in Hillside were robbed FIVE times in only THREE days.

May 2023: A female patron was robbed while waiting for gas by two teenagers in Maplewood.

June 2023: A station in Montclair was robbed by three individuals, police have no leads.

June 2023: Two stations in Bergen County (one in Garfield, the other in Elmwood Park) were robbed within ten minutes of each other.

The list above is not exhaustive, and only demonstrates the frequency with which small business owners in our industry are targeted.

What's more, many of these crimes go unsolved or take significant time before an arrest is made. In one example, a man robbed a Hazlet service station in August 2022 and was not picked up by law enforcement until May 2023. In others, no culprits are ever found, and station owners never see justice served.

The Solution: Site Security



Though the challenges of site security are numerous, there are ample solutions to help deter criminal activity and fraud at your location.

“Outfitting your location with a modern, efficient

surveillance security system is an investment that pays dividends in unforeseen ways”, stated long-time NJGCA Member Benefit Partner Dan Goff of Able-Tech. “I’ve served the small business community for 30+ years and installed countless systems of varying types. The feedback is always positive, with many owners telling me that they should have installed theirs sooner.”

What are some positive outcomes that can be gleaned when adopting preventative and precautionary security measures? Do they offer actual, real-world results?

Dan offers the following examples from instances he’s encountered over the years:

- In ferreting out the truth between an employee and a customer, cameras installed with audio recorded an incident at the check-out counter in which an employee was accused by a customer of rudeness to his wife. In replaying the incident for the husband, it was clear that the man’s wife was drunk and created a commotion. The husband later apologized to the owner.
- A store owner had their window smashed at night during a burglary, and \$8,000 in cigarettes stolen. In reviewing the video, it was discovered that the thieves were masked – but touched various surfaces in the sales area. The police were later able to use the footage to trace their movements and dust those areas for fingerprints. The lifted prints were used to identify the criminals and led to a subsequent arrest.
- The owner of a shop invested in upgrading an old camera system to a newer, more efficient high-resolution system. A few weeks later, there was an armed robbery at the location. Utilizing the internal camera footage, police were able to give the local television station clear video of the robbery. The thief was apprehended within hours and the police and station complimented “broadcast-quality” of the video and image to help make the arrest.

Of course, the above examples are not merely about protecting your facility, employees, patrons, and property. What also makes our business unique is that, when properly outfitted, small business owners can assist law enforcement in unrelated investigations. Being civic minded in this way is obviously selfless and beneficial to the community at large, but may also prevent your own establishment (or the personal property of your employees or patrons) from becoming a subsequent victim.

Moreover, there have been several viral videos around the country demonstrating some alarming behavior.

In some, patrons are robbed at service stations or convenience stores. Though self-serve contin-

ues to be illegal in New Jersey, motorists in other states have been beaten and robbed while pumping their own gas. One could easily imagine an employee attendant being similarly harmed while pumping gas for a patron.

Other videos have captured customers and employees being beaten during convenience store robberies, or had their vehicles stolen outside the store. In fact, in one harrowing episode earlier this year, a convenience store in New Jersey recorded a woman fleeing an assailant -- who had held her captive for a year! In another incident, footage from inside the store helped police track down a robber who also stabbed a station employee.

“When a client asks you to install a system, you must anticipate the placement of equipment and the types of incidents you’re attempting to capture. Still, you’d be surprised how many times the cameras will capture useful footage relating to other incidents. From negative customer encounters, employee workplace incidents, fuel delivery accidents, crimes occurring on surrounding properties, roadway accidents in the neighborhood, and more. In each case, the recordings proved invaluable. And the business owner looked like a ‘hero’ for having the foresight to install the system in the first place”, Dan offered.

Site Security: Evaluations and Recommendations

No small business owner invites a loss in profitability, harm to their reputation, or seeks to be victimized. Anytime someone steals from you, your customers, or your business, it not only hits your pocket, but also your standing in the community.

Thankfully, not only are you able to learn from the mistakes of fellow members (as we have shared here), but the Association has selected Member Benefit Partners to assist you in these endeavors. That you have an advantage that other shop owners in our industry lack.

“In terms of site security, every business is unique and should be evaluated for their unique risks and vulnerabilities. To get a real handle on that, you need to engage a professional. Even small changes can make a big difference” Dan said.

What should you do to get the ball rolling?

Every business owner should consider:

- Prevention and deterrence should always be the highest priority. Video can be a deterrent and a tool for prosecutions. However, owners can lose considerably more once legal fees, insurance costs, lost wages, and other expenses are tabulated. Knowing this, stopping the theft or fraud from occurring in the first place is “cheaper” and “smarter” in the long run.

- Getting an evaluation on your current security, surveillance, software reporting, and what can be improved upon.
- Consider if your current apparatus needs to be updated, and how the latest technologies can meet those needs. This doesn’t have to be an expensive endeavor, but it does take a trained eye to identify what is essential from what is excessive.
- Set cameras at all garage bay doors with invisible “threshold line crossing” alerts.
- Investigate after-hours lighting at your location. Modern, efficient, and affordable lighting alone can be an excellent deterrent. Thanks to modern LED technology, contemporary lighting does not consume excessive electricity overnight.
- Do not give physical keys to employees. Rather, look for a system that utilizes electronic door codes that can be uniquely attributed to every employee. If an employee leaves or is fired, a code can be eliminated to prevent them from gaining access to your shop after they’ve separated from your business.
- Evaluate your daily security routines; is it predictable and can it be improved?

“This is a starting point. There are other measures and services that can protect your shop from fraud and loss prevention. They are equally as important and we can touch on them in a future installment of On The Road”, Dan concluded.

If you have any questions about this article, please email Nick at nick@njgca.org or Dan Goff of Able-Tech at abletech@verizon.net





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THE ENERGY EXAMINER

FROM TRADITIONAL RESOURCES TO ALTERNATIVE ENERGY INNOVATIONS

By Michelle Horowitz Jackson



Since our debut in 2007, NJGCA *On The Road* has brought you timely updates on changes in the energy and automotive industries. Today, each new issue of *On The Road* will bring you more update and information in our *Energy Examiner*. The *Energy Examiner* will offer readers news from around the energy/transportation industry and how it will affect your small business. If you have any questions or comments on what you review in these quarterly pieces, please feel free to reach out to NJGCA.

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UPDATE: ETHANOL/BIOFUELS/BIODIESEL

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Chevron and ExxonMobil are currently testing renewable gasoline blends that could reduce emissions from gas-powered vehicles in line to the levels of electric vehicles (EVs). If made available commercially, the fuels have the potential of extending gasoline market life as the world transitions to EVs and cleaner fuels. In partnership with Toyota, renewable gasoline was created with soybeans and other non-fossil feedstocks and would be made available in gas stations and to fuel vehicle fleets, though commercially available biofuels are still a ways away. Exxon said its renewable gasoline reduced emissions up to 75% compared to regular gasoline on a life-cycle basis, while Chevron indicated more than 40% less carbon than regular gasoline.

Porsche and Ferrari are also researching and backing efuels, also known as electrofuels, as a solution to reduce carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Vehicles running on eFuels emit recycled carbon dioxide to avoid polluting the air with additional carbon dioxide the way a vehicle running on conventional gasoline would. Most of the 1.3 billion cars currently on the road could run on eFuels without any modifications to the vehicles or their engines and would allow the production of conventional vehicles to continue. More importantly, manufacturers see eFuels as a potential niche for sports cars and heavier modes of transport like planes and ships that are hard to shift to batteries.

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UPDATE: NUCLEAR

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As the industry and policymakers work on several fronts to build out and decarbonize nuclear energy, A bipartisan group of U.S. senators introduced legislation in April intended to reduce regulatory costs for licensing advanced nuclear reactor technologies, require the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to encourage licensing of nuclear facilities at brownfields and establish other routes to more quickly expand nuclear power. The ADVANCE Act, which stands for Accelerating Deployment of Versatile, Advanced Nuclear for Clean Energy, would modernize what the lawmakers say are outdated rules restricting international investment, reduce regulatory costs for companies seeking to license advanced reactor technologies, extend an established indemnification policy for continued operation of reactors and “give certainty” for capital investment in building reactors and establish other provisions.

UPDATE: ELECTRICITY & ELECTRIC POWERED VEHICLES

In April, the Biden administration proposed strict new automobile pollution limits that would effectively require at least 54% of new vehicles sold in the U.S. to be electric by 2030 and as many as two of every three by 2032, a nearly tenfold increase over current electric vehicle sales. The proposed tailpipe pollution limits don't require a specific number of electric vehicles to be sold every year, but instead mandate limits on greenhouse gas emissions. While this will surely move the market towards more electric models, more manufacturing incentives and tax credits to make EVs more affordable will be necessary.

Later in April, President Biden announced tax credits for qualifying EVs to the tune of \$7,500 back from the federal government (maximum). **The list of qualifications to receive a tax credit are:**

- Have a battery capacity of at least 7 kilowatt hours
- Have a gross vehicle weight rating of less than 14,000 pounds
- Be made by a qualified manufacturer. Fuel Cell Vehicles do not need to be made by a qualified manufacturer to be eligible
- Undergo final assembly in North America
- Meet critical mineral and battery component requirements (as of April 18, 2023).

The sale qualifies only if:

- You buy the vehicle new
- The seller reports required information to you at the time of sale and to the IRS.

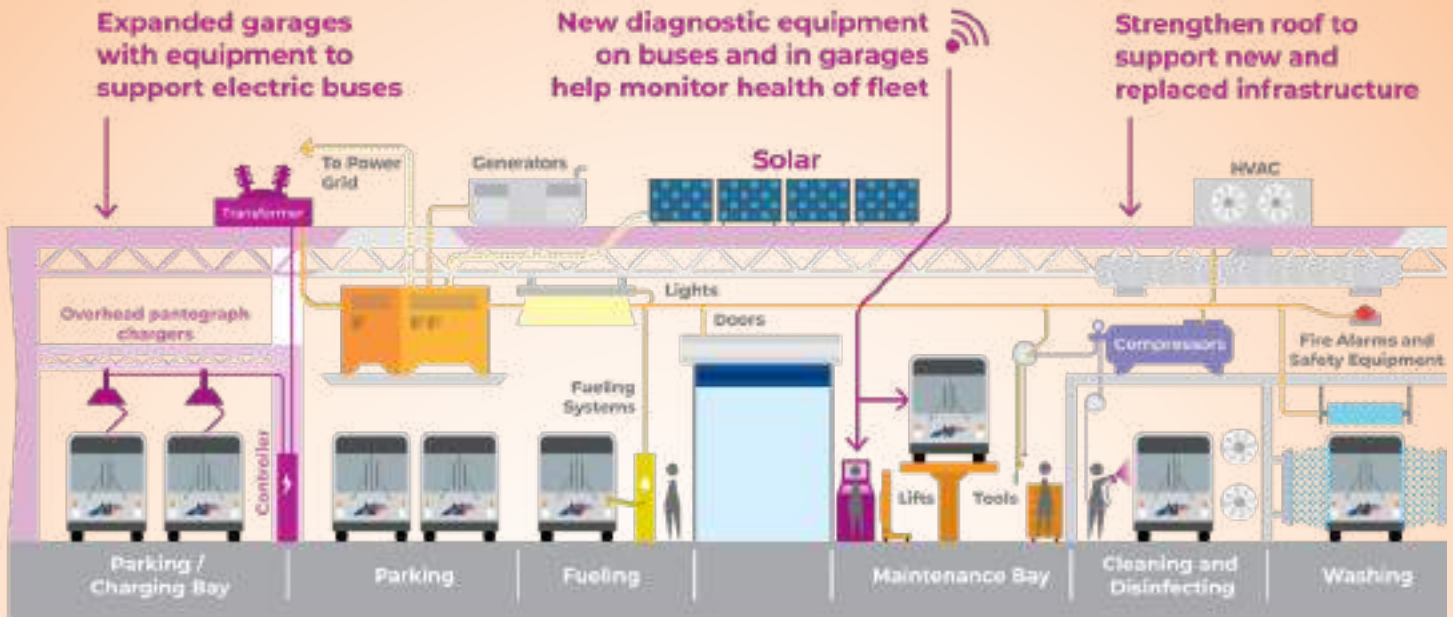
In addition, the vehicle's manufacturer suggested retail price (MSRP) can't exceed:

- \$80,000 for vans, sport utility vehicles and pickup trucks
- \$55,000 for other vehicles

The most challenging aspect of the new rules is that starting in 2024, no battery components from "foreign entities of concern" (i.e. China) will be permitted at all. In 2025, that rule will apply to minerals, as well. This has reintroduced a monumental issue for the US EV production market and for incentivizing EVs, removing Chinese materials completely out of the U.S. EV supply chain. Carmakers will need to find a way to move their supply chains out of China and over to the U.S. or friendly countries, and this rule effectively significantly shortens the list of electric vehicles that qualify for federal tax credits. Therefore, the race is on for manufacturers whose vehicles don't qualify for the U.S. tax credits to acquire the minerals and components that will satisfy the requirements. The credit awards a significant competitive advantage to any car that makes the grade.

New Jersey:

In New Jersey, a lack of a constitutionally dedicated funding source has made difficult Governor Murphy's plans to transition the state's bus fleet to zero-emissions. Some federal grant money has allowed New Jersey Transit (NJT) to make progress developing plans to make the switch. However, the real challenge will be finding the money for the needed upgrades to the aging garages so they can store and charge batteries on zero-emission buses. NJT is currently testing eight battery-operated buses in Camden through a pilot program, with a second program set in Newark for 2026. Obtaining the zero-emissions buses are less of an issue for the agency than ensuring that NJ Transit has the infrastructure at its 16 outdated bus garages to store and charge buses. In late June, it was announced that \$1.7 billion in additional funds was released by the Federal Transit Administration. Awarded funds to New Jersey will allow New Jersey Transit to install bus charging equipment and modernize garages to accommodate this new technology. The second phase of the electric bus program is to test an additional eight buses on the #25 route in Newark. Data collected from the pilot programs will help NJ Transit officials make decisions about where to deploy its initial 100 electric buses and how to restructure bus routes.



Other EV News:

While automakers scramble to develop zero emissions vehicles to match legislation, in a new poll from the Energy Policy Institute reported that nearly half of Americans say it's unlikely they would purchase an electric vehicle as their next car, citing the same barriers to entry that we have been reporting for years now. The lack of charging options and the high costs continue to prevent many motorists from taking the plunge to all electric vehicles. Nearly 80% of the public cite the lack of charging infrastructure as a primary reason for not buying an EV, a concern that was consistent among residents from cities, suburbs and rural areas, according to the poll.

A challenge for New Jersey legislators will be figuring out how to tax EV users to maintain roads, as roads are funded by the gas tax and the steady increase in EVs on the roads have seen a decrease in revenue of the funds. Other ideas for making sure EVs are contributing to the fund include raising registration fees for EVs, taxing drivers for the miles they drive rather than the gas they buy, and imposing fuel taxes on electricity sold at commercial chargers.

Batteries:

Elon Musk announced on Twitter that his company would build a factory in Shanghai to assemble 10,000 giant "Mega-pack" batteries annually for electric producers and distributors. According to Tesla, the batteries, which are roughly the length and height of an international shipping container, can power 3,600 homes for one hour. The capacity to store electricity when it isn't in demand is critical as the market continues to shift away from fossil fuels. The batteries are intended to power factories or homes when demand from the local power grid is high or during a blackout. Meanwhile in Georgia, a \$4.3 billion electric vehicle battery plant, expected to bring 3,000 new jobs to southeast Georgia by the end of 2025 will be built by Hyundai Motor Group and LG Energy Solutions. This is the second battery manufacturing plant that Hyundai is developing in the state, which has used incentives in the federal "Inflation Reduction Act" to open new facilities.

A San Francisco-based company, Ample Inc., is exploring another method of 'charging' that doesn't involve charging at all. Battery swapping could be a viable EV charging alternative, with the thought being that replacing EV batteries instead of waiting for them to charge will get drivers back on the road faster, and it can be done with minimal electrical infrastructure. Ample has designed smaller batteries that are easy to move around, and can either restore the whole battery or just a section of it depending on how much range the vehicle needs. Ample would have stations that cars would pull into. Used battery modules are unscrewed from the vehicle and replaced with charged ones. The empties are then shuttled to a large adjoining cabinet, where they are recharged. Ample is set to receive a \$15 million grant in California to expand its Bay Area factory and has even secured an EV partner in Fisker Inc.

Charging:

A recent report by S&P Global Mobility found that by 2030, there will need to be more than 2.1 million public EV chargers to support an expected 28 million electric vehicles on America's roads. Several business initiatives have been announced in the recent months to continue to expand the nations charging network. Walmart announced intentions to build an EV fast-charging network across thousands of Walmart and Sam's Club locations by 2030. The fast-chargers would be in addition to the almost 1,300 EV fast-charging stations currently available at more than 280 Walmart and Sam's Club locations. According to Vishal Kapadia, senior vice president of energy transformation for Walmart, the additions to the charging network will be disruptive to the range anxiety of EV motorists. He said "With a store or club located within 10 miles of approximately 90% of Americans, [Walmart is] uniquely positioned to deliver a convenient charging option that will help make EV ownership possible whether people live in rural, suburban or urban areas." Italian company Enel also has plans to build a charging networking, promising another 10,000 chargers nationwide across US highways by 2030 using government subsidies to cover the cost. This addition will nearly double the number of fast EV chargers in the U.S. Enel also plans to enter the at-home charging arena by building fast chargers for owners, and further expects to build at least two million chargers in North America by the end of the decade.

Automakers are also exploring ways to make the charging process more seamless. Ford, General Motors, and Rivian, together with Tesla, recently made the decision to start allowing their electric vehicles to use Tesla chargers and, in the future, will even build their vehicles with charging ports based on Tesla's design standards. This means that these vehicles would be able to use Tesla chargers without needing an adapter. This move aligns the top three EV automakers (Ford and GM are a distant second and third to Tesla) on the same charging network. Rivian, a fairly new but growing in popularity player in the market, said it will start building its R1T pickup and R1S SUV with a standard charging port starting in 2025. Its upcoming smaller models will also have the Tesla-style charging ports. By spring, 2024, Rivian owners will be able to use adapters to access Tesla's Supercharger network, with its roughly 12,000 fast charging stations throughout the US and Canada.

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UPDATE: HYBRIDS

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Toyota has developed a new plug-in hybrid vehicle hoping to bridge the gap between gas and electric. They will combine gas engines with electric motors to save fuel, and can drive primarily on batteries with the engine as a backup; mimicking a full EV on the road. Toyota says it plans to develop plug-in models capable of driving more than 124 miles in EV mode. Despite being a natural bridge between old and new rules, regulators in places like California are moving to limit or exclude plug-in hybrids from rules mandating a transition to pure electric.



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UPDATE: HYDROGEN/HYDROGEN FUEL CELLS

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Honda is officially joining Toyota in further developing hydrogen options for the future of transportation. Honda and Suzuki recently announced a partnership with Yamaha and Kawasaki that will consider the development of hydrogen-powered motorcycles that use internal combustion engines. A recent press release announced a new research association between the companies called "Hydrogen Small mobility & Engine technology" for developing hydrogen-powered engines for small mobility. Specifically, the partnership will explore the use of hydrogen for powering small boats, drones, construction equipment and "mini vehicles" as well as motorcycles. Suzuki will study functionality,



performance and reliability from a hands-off perspective, while Yamaha and Kawasaki will test them in hands-on experimentation. Honda will research development of the engines themselves. Yamaha will also study the requirements for a hydrogen refueling system. Kawasaki Heavy Industries and Toyota are also partnering on this project. Using their experience in developing hydrogen power for larger vehicles, they will support the project with information they've gained from their previous R&D.

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UPDATE: GASOLINE

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According to the International Energy Agency, world demand for oil is likely to drop off sharply over the next five years after 2026 due to the gradual shift to electric vehicles and other cleaner technologies. The forecast comes amid a lingering slump in oil prices, which have failed to respond to recent cuts in output orchestrated by Saudi Arabia. The agency's report is likely to add to fears among oil traders that China, once a leader of global oil demand growth, no longer performs this role. China's economic recovery from Covid isn't producing the same sort of oil demand growth that the country had pre-pandemic. While long-term forecasts are uncertain, the agency is more positive for oil's short-term outlook predicting that world demand will jump by a strong 2.4 million barrels a day in 2023, a modest increase from a report published last month and a view that some consider overly optimistic.

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DISRUPTIONS COMING TO YOUR BUSINESS

Walmart, a constant business disruptor, continues to use automation and robots to boost company profits. All 42 of its regional distribution centers will add automation and symbiotic technology to its warehouse facilities. Within three years, the retailer thinks around two-thirds of all stores will receive service through some automation. While the changes are expected to affect 1.6 million jobs, the company claims that the changes will up capacity rather than slash positions. They point to their first year of using automation in their facility where no employees left their positions. Fewer people would be necessary to unload pallets at warehouses, so more people would be available to deliver online orders to customers' doors.

Grocery stores in the UK are using facial recognition software to stop and prevent shoplifting, which has increased dramatically in recent years. By capturing shoplifters' faces and submitting them to a facial recognition program, store staff will be able to receive an alert next time someone entered into the program tries to return to the store. While facial recognition software is mostly used by police in this country, it is slowly making its way into the private business sphere. Most recently, Eric Adams, mayor of New York City, encouraged retailers to try the technology to fight crime. Madison Square Garden and Radio City Music Hall have also used automated facial recognition to refuse entry to lawyers whose firms have sued the company. Could this technology find its way to our industries as well? As it becomes more commonplace and less expensive to implement, we may see this tool used more often as theft continues to be a huge issue post-COVID.



With so many changes happening economically and to the automotive industry between the move to zero emissions vehicles, the global chip shortage, low inventory, and inflation, we can see some interesting new trends happening that are disrupting the industry. On the repair side, EVs have no air filters, antifreeze, spark plugs, or oil changes. Because EVs have fewer mechanical parts that are prone to failure compared with those powered by internal-combustion engines, some repairs will eventually become obsolete should we see the day no gasoline vehicles are on the roads. However, EVs have more sensors than gas powered vehicles, creating more demand not just for the parts themselves, but also for the calibration tools that auto repair shops require to fix them. EV batteries are also heavy, which means some parts wear out more frequently.

Notably, the average age of an electric vehicle in the U.S. was just 3.8 years as of 2022, according to S&P Global Mobility. By contrast, the average age of all light vehicles in operation was 12.2 years, statistically longer than ever before. We already know the impact the pandemic had on these numbers, with new car prices reaching record highs and used vehicle prices surging even more, up 40%. Mechanics are now repairing vehicles that are older than ever, some with 250,000-300,000 miles which has made the repairs more expensive than ever. However, it can be more cost effective for many to fix an older vehicle rather than go into debt buying a new one, particularly at higher interest rates.

In New Jersey, a driverless machine cleaning streets, warehouses, and parking lots throughout the ports is being piloted by the New Jersey Port Authority. The human driven street sweepers are limited in that they aren't used at night, when there's low visibility; they require someone to operate; they are too big to reach more complex areas, like the berths by the water; and they can't be used inside warehouses because of their size and because they run on diesel. The autonomous vehicle the Port Authority is piloting would solve most of those issues as an all-electric smaller sweeper that doesn't require a driver. It can pick up gravel, stone, sand and salt, and safely stops quickly in the event something blocks its path. Data collected from the pilot will also help determine whether that technology can be applied elsewhere within the agency, such as major airports, the PATH train service, bridges and tunnels, and the World Trade Center campus. Earlier this year, the Port Authority also piloted the first drone to carry cargo over the Hudson River (a box of cookies). A second-phase pilot will be conducted this summer to test





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