

THE PLAIN DEALER

Summit fuel quality tests find dozens of violations

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Akron- Some motorists aren't getting the quality of gasoline they're paying for.

Testing of 240 service stations in Summit County - the state's first program to test fuel quality - found dozens of violations.

The violations included water in fuel and a few instances of octane levels lower than advertised. In hundreds of less-serious cases, inspectors said they found circumstances that could lead to contamination of storage tanks.

The inspections are "a way to let the service stations and the customers know that there is a possibility of bad gas," said Summit County fiscal officer John Donofrio, who implemented the testing. "We're here to ensure that they get a good product."

County auditors have long tested to ensure that motorists get a full gallon of gasoline, but Ohio is one of just four states that have no guidelines for statewide testing of fuel quality.

State legislators for years have discussed fuel testing guidelines but have failed to pass legislation.

Because Summit County enjoys a unique charter form of government, it can enact laws such as fuel testing while the rest of the state must wait for the state legislature to authorize such a measure.

Donofrio released statistics Wednesday that showed:

Twenty violations of water in gasoline storage tanks.

Six violations of water in diesel fuel storage tanks.

Eight violations of the composition of diesel fuel.

Three violations of lower-than-advertised octane ratings.

Thirty-five violations of stations failing to post accurate labels of octane ratings.

Service station owners were not cited, Donofrio said, because this was the first round of testing. Most owners were cooperative, and Donofrio said he is not trying to hurt small businesses. He ultimately hopes to post inspection results on his county Web site.

Summit County's program carries penalties for stations that violate the quality standards. A first violation will bring a written citation, and inspectors have the authority to shut the station down if necessary. Subsequent violations can mean fines of up to \$1,500.

Donofrio said his program, which he said costs about \$30,000 annually, could spur the state to enact similar legislation. The County Auditors' Association of Ohio supports enactment of a fuel quality testing law, while the oil and gas industry questions such a proposal.

Terry Fleming, director of the Ohio Petroleum Council, said gasoline pumps already have filters to remove sediment found in fuel storage tanks. No service station operator should be punished for having water in his fuel, so long as he corrects the problem, Fleming said.

"You have anything buried underground, you will have water," Fleming said.

He said he does support measures to ensure that motorists receive the advertised octane in fuel they buy.

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