

Think Safety

Do you know what to do in the event of a fuel spill? How about if you are missing hundreds of gallons of gas from your tank when you check the inventory report? Although customer service is a big part of managing a store, spill response and walk-through inspections of your petroleum storage system are equally important.

Common sense dictates that every business develops an employee training protocol. In the petroleum marketing industry, the protocol should include responsibilities from restroom maintenance to fuel management. With respect to fuel management, besides training employees on day-to-day responsibilities, it is also very important that every employee be aware of safety issues and be familiar with general safety tips. Key petroleum storage safety tips include knowing what the emergency fuel stop button is, where it is located, who to call if there is a fuel spill or fire, how to clean up smaller spills from vehicle overfills, and what all storage tank gauges and alarms indicate.

In the event of a spill or release, employees should know what steps to take. Protocols should require the employee on duty to contact the company official who is responsible for handling releases. If the spill creates a fire hazard, the local emergency response authority should be contacted immediately. Depending on the quantity or severity of the release, DNR should also be contacted. If there is an equipment failure, contact your petroleum equipment vendor. If your site has coverage with PMMIC, you should report all releases to them so that they may advise on other necessary steps. It is very important to notify all of these entities immediately to get the problem stopped and prevent the release from causing more damage. All of these phone numbers should be listed at the counter or near the phone. It is the owner's responsibility to contact each of these entities.

If there is a smaller spill (less than 25 gallons), it is still important to react quickly. Any amount of fuel can be harmful if it reaches a creek, storm drain, or monitoring well. Once a spill is contained, all fuel should be cleaned up immediately. If "oil dry" or absorbent pads are used, they should be properly disposed of once they are saturated or the fuel is completely soaked up. All facilities should have a cleanup kit available, and all employees should know how to use it.

The fire extinguisher is another item that all employees should be familiar with. They should be readily accessible, and re-certified annually by the fire department. Fire can be a very dangerous situation, especially when fuel is mixed into the equation, so use your best judgment when battling a fire. Sometimes the fire extinguisher may only serve the purpose of getting you to safety.

All facilities should implement a routine walk-through inspection, both inside and outside the store. When inside, the inspector should be checking all monitors, gauges, alarms, and emergency equipment. All equipment must be readily accessible. Moving boxes or displays is not very convenient when there is an emergency. When outside, the inspector should be checking the condition of all hoses, nozzles, spill basins, and sumps. It is important to stop small leaks before they become big problems. Likewise, it is important to make sure all secondary containment is clean and ready to catch any fuel that might be spilled during the day-to-day operation.

When you are conducting your daily or monthly inventory reconciliation, and it is evident that fuel is not accounted for, you should contact your equipment contractor, PMMIC and the DNR immediately. It is very important that you address this situation immediately. The longer you wait to take corrective action, the more expensive the cleanup will likely be.

Although the alarms and inspections may seem like a hassle, they serve a very important purpose and should not be ignored. Nobody knows exactly when an accident will happen, but you can at least be ready for one when it does happen.