Gas prices could be headed for $4 per gallon

By SCOTT WHIPPLE
STAFF WRITER

Area motorists could be paying more than $4 for a gallon of gas this spring as refineries conduct their seasonal maintenance. The statewide average price for gas could reach an estimated $4.05 a gallon, compared to a national peak this spring of $3.75 a gallon.

"Winter weather, weak demand and sufficient supplies have kept gas prices relatively low, but this trend may not last much longer," warns AAA Public Affairs Manager Aaron Kupec. "Driving to the gas station could be a lot more frustrating as prices increase this spring."

Prices generally rise in the spring because many refineries cut production to conduct seasonal maintenance. This can limit gasoline supplies and cause market uncertainty. This maintenance generally takes place between strong demand periods for heating oil in the winter and for gasoline in the summer.

During the first half of 2013, the Connecticut average peaked at $3.99 a gallon on Feb. 22. The seasonal peak will likely occur later this year because of the frigid and stormy conditions that have gripped the region so far in 2014.

After the springtime peak, gas prices generally fall as the refinery maintenance period ends and production returns to normal rates, though there could be temporary price increases due to unexpected problems.

Strong demand generally leads to higher gas prices during the second half of the summer. Prices could also be driven higher by an active Atlantic hurricane season. Fortunately, by October, gas prices should start a long decline due to weakening demand and the switchover to less expensive winter-blend gasoline.

"Unexpected developments and events overseas could change AAA's price outlook considerably, but there's little doubt that gas this year will cost more than most of us would like," said Kupec. "The best advice for dealing with another tough year is to shop around, maintain your car and stay within the speed limit."

Chris Herb, president of Cromwell-based Connecticut Energy Marketers Association, cautions that "we can never predict future prices, but we are in a moderate-to-strong gasoline supply situation and weak demand for gasoline. Those market fundamentals typically would suggest lower prices, but it appears that traders are pushing the price based on optimism that the economy is improving and people that were unemployed will be back on the road going to work."

Mike Orazzi | Staff

Gas prices at the Citgo gas station at the intersection of Cook Street and New Britain Avenue in Plainville.

Herb says that growing domestic production of crude oil should put downward pressure on gasoline prices in the long term, as long as Wall Street speculators don't manufacture excuses to trade the price up.

Michael Fox, executive director of the Connecticut Gasoline and Service Dealers Association, agrees with Herb.

"When anyone looks at the inventory level of both refined gasoline and crude oil most would agree these are fundamentals that suggest gasoline prices should be coming way down," he says. "After all, we're way above the five-year average and refiner output is below 90 percent."

Fox says because we have more gasoline than we need we have been exporting it at record levels.

So why the anticipated high prices?

According to Kupek, Connecticut has expensive gas because of higher taxes and because refineries in the Northeast must rely on more costly, imported crude oil and gasoline due to infrastructure and pipeline limitations.

Fox blames high prices at the pumps on Connecticut's state and federal gasoline taxes. The state's taxes are the second highest in the U.S. California tops the list while New York and Connecticut often battle it out for the second place.

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Pictured on Page 1: The Citgo gas station on Broad Street in the Forestville section of Bristol. Photo by Mike Orazzi

Bristol Hospital holds first aid course for pet owners

By KASSONDRA GRANATA
STAFF WRITER

BRISTOL — The first aid a lessons offered at Bristol Hospital Saturday had a different twist — they were to give pet owners the skills needed to give cere to animals in an emergency situation.

Pet owners spent the morning learning how to recognize behaviors in their pets, restrain them and make a first aid kit.

Sharon Kenney, EMS education manager, also covered scene safety, rescue breathing and how to put a muzzle on a dog mannequin. Kenney started the program last year and said she received many phone calls about continuing the course. Based on the interest, she will offer another session of the course on May 3.

"Doing these programs keep pets safe and pet owners can learn how to provide the appropriate care," she said.

Kenney showed the class how to make a pet first aid kit and what different supplies can be put in the bag. Some items to pack are saline, peroxide, baking soda and a plain can of pumpkin.

"Each of these basic items can be used to take care of your pet," she said. According to Kenney, giving your dog a teaspoon of peroxide can make it regurgitate anything it might have accidentally swallowed.

Hurricane Katrina was one of the biggest factors that inspired Kenney to teach this course. After she read a study, Kenney discovered that a lot of animals died because they weren't permitted to evacuate with them and owners did not secure them well enough during the storm.

"If you ask any one in this room if they would leave their pet behind if they had to evacuate, they wouldn't leave," she said.

Southington police Officer Steve Salerno attended the course with his retired K-9, Damon. Salerno said he came to the course with Damon to learn how to take care of their dogs just in case they run into trouble.

"The potential of them getting injured is really high, especially if they accidentally get into drugs or other hazardous situations," he said. "We have to know how to take care of them and educate ourselves on how to keep them safe."

To those who wish to attend the class on May 3, participants can call Kenney at (860)314-0632. The course is $35. Police officers may bring their trained dogs, but other animals are not allowed.

Mike Orazzi | Staff

Bristol Hospital EMS education manager Sharon Kenney talks about items that can be used to treat injured pets during a pet emergency first aid program at the Bristol Hospital EMS Training Center on Saturday morning in Bristol.