

Rocketing Misfuelling Problem Costing Drivers Millions, Says AA

Tens of thousands of drivers every year are being hit with major repair bills after putting the wrong fuel in their car and the problem is getting worse, according to The AA Motoring Trust.

Misfuelling is estimated to affect 120,000 UK drivers each year, with the average bill for repair being 150. It is increasingly caused by drivers mistakenly putting petrol into diesel-engined cars.

Now The AA Motoring Trust and petrol retailers are launching an information campaign to tackle the problem. This month, petrol nozzles at selected petrol retailers will carry messages alerting drivers to the issue, while cards carrying the warning will be distributed to AA members through three million copies of the AA Magazine.

Later in the year, petrol stations across the UK will distribute millions more cards with petrol receipts. The campaign is being supported by the UK Petroleum Industry Association, the Petrol Retailers' Association, the Association of UK Oil Independents and the British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association.

The recent boom in the sales of diesel cars, which now account for one in four of new cars sold, means that the opportunities for forecourt confusion will continue each year unless something is done to prevent it. In the last year, the AA breakdown service was called to 43,000 vehicles which had broken down because the wrong fuel had been put into the tank.

John Stubbs, head of technical policy for The AA Motoring Trust, says: "Drivers need to think before they put the wrong nozzle in the filler. While the estimated 120,000 misfuellings each year are only a tiny percentage of the total number of visits to the pumps estimated to be four million a day the disruption to those who are unlucky enough to do it is considerable.

"The major oil companies have agreed to standardise the colour of nozzles and hoses for unleaded and diesel, which is very welcome, as is their decision to review nozzle adverts to reduce potential customer confusion at the point of delivery.

"In the future, once the petrol industry standardises, car manufacturers could do more there's no reason why the filler caps and the area around the filler neck can't be more clearly marked and colour coded."

The AA Motoring Trust says that many households now have two cars, often using different fuels, and drivers who use both from time to time are particularly vulnerable to misfuelling. It is also a problem when people hire cars, and with drivers who use a differently fuelled vehicle at work from their own. The cost of repairing the damage done when a car has been filled with the wrong fuel depends on whether it has been driven before the mistake is noticed. If it has not been started, then usually the tank simply needs to be drained, but if the car has been driven major repairs may be needed, which can cost as much as 3,000. Clean, modern fuel-efficient cars are very sensitive to the quality of what is in the tank, so even a small amount of the wrong fuel can have serious consequences.

John Stubbs says the problem does not end there, as the contaminated fuel that is drained from the car presents an environmental hazard: "The fuel is to all intents and purposes useless, and has to be disposed of at special disposal centres, which just adds to the cost to the driver."

"We must try to reduce misfuelling by raising awareness of the problem among all drivers, so that every time they refuel they make the right decision about what they are putting in the tank."

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