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Consumer Tips for the Safe Management of Gasoline

From grass cutting to snow blowing, and boating to snowmobiling, we depend on gasoline-powered engines to enhance our lives. While beneficial, gasoline is also highly volatile, extremely flammable, and highly toxic. Gasoline is perhaps the most dangerous product commonly found around the home because of its volatility and toxicity.

Hazardous components commonly found in gasoline include benzene (a known carcinogen), ethylene dichloride, methanol, petroleum hydrocarbons, tetraethyl lead, and, in reformulated gasoline, MtBE.

Consequences from misuse or mishandling are many. Sparks and flames can easily ignite gasoline vapors and it is explosive under pressure. Inhaling gasoline vapors can cause lung and central nervous system damage. A gasoline spill, even in the smallest amount, can contaminate surface and ground water, including drinking water wells.

How to Safely Use Gasoline

- Never smoke around gasoline.
- Avoid breathing the vapors when fueling your vehicle or small engines.
- Never siphon gasoline using your mouth (can be fatal if one teaspoon goes into the lungs).
- When handling gasoline, wear nitrile gloves and thoroughly wash your hands when finished and before eating or smoking.
- Do not use as a cleaner or solvent.
- Never mix gasoline with waste oil.
- Never burn brush or start a camp fire with leftover gasoline.

To avoid spills, do not top off your fuel tank. Portable tanks from motor boats should be removed from the vessel and filled in a secure location onshore; a secondary containment device under the tank ensures even better protection. Owners of larger boats should install no-spill tank vents. During the winter recreation season, refuel snowmobiles and other gasoline-powered engines such as fishing augers, on shore and not out on frozen lakes and ponds.

Safe Storage of Gasoline

- Store no more than 10 gallons; the less you have around, the safer you'll be.
- Use only self-venting containers approved by a nationally recognized testing lab (such as Underwriters Laboratories, UL) and always leave an air space for expansion. These

containers should be clearly labeled to identify the contents and fitted with a spout to allow pouring without spilling. If possible, store in a well ventilated shed or detached garage, away from the reach of children.

- Never store gasoline in containers such as glass jars or plastic milk jugs; these can break or deteriorate causing a spill or fire.
- Keep gas containers out of direct sunlight. Never store in your basement or in your car's trunk.
- Gasoline moves quickly through the soil and into groundwater, so store gasoline and fuel equipment as far away and down slope from your drinking water well as possible.
- Once a month, check for leaks from fuel tanks, engines and storage containers.

How to Safely Dispose of Gasoline

- Do not allow gasoline to become contaminated or old.
- Buy what you need and use it up. If left over six months, gas can go stale and should not be used. It is possible, however, to strain old gasoline through a paint filter, dilute by one-half with fresh gasoline and use in lawnmowers and other small engines.
- Taking your old gasoline in an approved gasoline container to your town's household hazardous waste collection is probably the safest and most convenient method for disposal.

What to Do If a Spill Occurs

- Use petroleum-absorbing pads to soak up spilled fuel when refueling and when working on engine repairs and maintenance.
- Spilled gasoline or cleaning materials should never be left on the ground or put in your garbage, drains, toilets or sewers. If you do, it might cause a fire, or seep into streams, bays, lakes or your groundwater.
- If you do have a gasoline spill at or near your property, call the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services emergency petroleum spill number for reporting the spill as well as for information and assistance on cleanup. This number is (603) 271-3899, Monday through Friday,
8:00 a.m. to 4 p.m. At all other times, report spills to the NH State Police at (603) 223-4381.

Remember...

When using gasoline, buy only what you need and use what you have. Take steps to avoid spills, store away from your home and drinking well, and watch for leaks and report all spills.