‘We Card’ program helps to snuff out underage smoking

Under 18? No tobacco, because “We Card.” That is a common statement heard today at retail locations throughout the state. It is against the law to sell tobacco products to anyone under the age of 18. But for some cashiers, owners or managers, this line of questioning is much more difficult than it may seem.

In order to help those on the front lines, “We Card” training programs were held throughout the state in the month of February. These training programs had two goals—to supply information to cashiers, managers and owners on the proper ways to enforce the laws and to bring awareness of the “We Card” program to communities across the state. It is very important that community members understand why retailers must use the “We Card” program. When a customer is in line and there seems to be a delay because we have asked someone for identification, they need to know that we are doing our part to stop underage smoking. This questioning puts the cashier in a difficult spot because customers do not like delays while waiting in line and the person being carded many times does not care for that either. The “We Card” program gives helpful hints on handling these situations and making sure the product is delivered to only those over 18 in an orderly fashion.

Under FDA rules that went into effect on Feb. 28th, not only must 18 year olds and younger be carded, but also anyone who appears to be under the age of 27 must show proper identification. In order to meet this requirement, the “We Card” program recommends that anyone appearing under the age of 27 be carded.

Look for the cherries to find SSDA Annual Convention information

Wherever you see the cherry logo, you can be sure to find information on the 1997 SSDA Annual Convention at the Park Place Hotel in Traverse City on August 3-6. The logo reflects the Traverse City area’s cherry growing industry while serving as a colorful guidepost in Convention mailings and publications. See page 10 for more Annual Convention information.
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President’s Corner —

Dennis Sidorski, SSDA-MI President

Opportunity is knocking

Our business has a lot of ups and downs. Many times it feels like there are more downs than anything. We need to make sure we take advantage of every opportunity we have in order to survive and maybe even prosper.

One such opportunity that we can take advantage of is our SSDA membership. Many members participate in all the activities and benefits that the Association offers. Many others only use one or two of the Association’s programs. While we are happy to serve our members in various capacities, we would like to encourage more participation in Association programs and events that will make things a bit easier for you.

The SSDA Convention is one of the best ways to get more involved in the Association. The big value of being an Association member is the chance to collaborate with fellow members and the Convention is the main source of this collaboration among SSDA members. Many ideas, improvements and member benefit programs have come about as a direct result of discussions at the Convention. For example, some members expressed their concerns about hiring quality employees at last year’s Convention. The SSDA Board of Directors and staff then researched the problem and developed SSDA’s new relationship with CRIS Information Services, an employee screening service (see the information on page 8).

In addition, many useful ideas pass between members at the formal discussions and the more informal social events. A big problem in our business is it is easy to feel as if you are on your own when a problem arises. By attending the SSDA Convention, you will get to speak with many other members from around the state who face the same problems you do each day. A dealer from Troy can talk to a dealer from Grand Rapids and not feel like he is giving away any secrets. Why should we struggle with solutions to the same problems on our own when we can get quicker and even better results by working together?

I would like to personally invite you to this year’s annual convention. If you have never attended a Convention in the past, this year is the time to start. This year’s Convention at the Park Place Hotel in Traverse City on August 3-6, promises to be another informative and fun-filled event. See the information on page 10 for more details and call the SSDA office at 517-484-4096 to register today. Also, watch your mail for more information on this event.

Let’s come together at this year’s Convention to learn from each other so we have more ups than downs in the coming year.
Swartz Creek member celebrates 50 years of service

Congratulations to Don Spillane of Swartz Creek who marked 50 years as a service station owner in December.

Don, a long-time SSDA member, owned the Apple Creek Amoco Food Shop on Morrish Road next to I-69 from December 15, 1946 until his retirement at the end of last December.

The business has been around since 1911 when Don’s grandfather, Frank Kennedy, opened it as a tire shop. In 1915, Standard gas pumps were installed and in 1929 the station was rebuilt—complete with two inside car bays and a lifting hoist. Don’s father, Ben Spillane, took over the business in 1938 when Kennedy died.

Don became a business partner with Ben in 1946, and Don’s brother, Jack, joined them in 1950. Don became the sole owner after the deaths of his father and brother.

Over the years, Don moved the station to its present location and converted the two-bay garage into a food mart. He just recently sold the station to retire.

SSDA is proud to serve dealers like Don and his family who have been successful by evolving with the times. We wish him luck in the future and a happy retirement.

Battle Creek member named Man of the Year by regional publication

Because of his hard work and dedication to community work, SSDA member Jim Hazel has been named Man of the Year by the Battle Creek publication Scene Magazine.

Jim, who owns Union 76 Service on the Beadle Lake Road exit of I-94 east of Battle Creek, does an unbelievable amount of volunteer work in his community. He contributes his time to many youth development projects and community building programs. A few organizations he works with include the YMCA Camping and Retreat Services, the Boy Scouts, the Battle Creek Community Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. He teaches second graders at his area’s Junior Achievement program and is on the Rotary Club board of directors. He is also an active supporter of his area high school, Harper Creek, where he has started an alumni association.

We are proud to have Jim as an SSDA member. His community involvement shows customers the value of independent dealers to the industry and their hometown. We appreciate all Jim does for the people of Calhoun County and the service station industry and we believe the award is very well-deserved.

Congratulations Jim!
New Blue Cross mail order prescription benefit helps cut rising health care costs

Lawmakers were told recently by business and labor officials that after several years of overall moderate increases in health care costs, the rate of cost hikes is expected to begin to rise to more than twice the rate of consumer inflation.

Those expected increases mean that ways of holding the line on cost increases will continue to be a key issue in the upcoming years. Finding ways to keep costs under control will prove increasingly difficult.

In February, Blue Cross Blue Shield announced another enhancement to their benefits to help reduce health care costs. Blue Cross announced the addition of mail order service for prescription drug benefits. Eligible members may want to use the mail order program for prescription medicine they take on an ongoing basis. Not only will the program save members money, it offers the convenience of having medicine shipped directly to their homes. Members can receive up to a 90 day supply of medication for a single co-payment if applicable. Notification to eligible members will be sent by mail later this month.

While many members may find the mail order service attractive, those who prefer more personalized service can continue to have their prescriptions filled locally at one of their participating pharmacists. The pharmacy network remains the same.

The SSDA, along with Blue Cross Blue Shield, is always reviewing the benefits offered by the Association in order to keep costs as low as possible and we are pleased with the announcement of the Blue Cross mail order services.

If you have any questions about Blue Cross Blue Shield coverage or would like to know more about this June's open enrollment period, contact your agent or the SSDA office at 517-484-4096.

In memory...

Our condolences go out to the family of long-time SSDA member and Shell dealer Robert J. Adams, who passed away in January.

Mr. Adams owned Bob Adams Shell Service in Birmingham from 1951 until December 1993 when he sold the station. His son, Bob, had been a partner in the business with him. Mr. Adams also owned Bob Adams towing with his son, Terry, who still operates that business.

We are grateful to Mr. Adams for his contributions to the service station industry over the past 40 years and we extend our warmest regards to his wife, JoAnn, and his entire family.

SSDA Classifieds

For Sale

Algonac station—120' x 120' frontage on M29 in Algonac. Two bays, c-store, full service and self-service. Gasoline, kerosene and diesel. Some equipment will stay. Across the street from public access to St. Clair River. At present a Sunoco, but can change. Call (810) 794-4310.

Car wash—A used rollover car wash. Nu-Star poly pad, five brush, soft cloth wash with underbody rinse. Good operating condition, well maintained, newer cloth. Used three years. Call Tim Mariner or John Racine at (616) 538-7990.

Equipment—Wayne Decade cash register, and a True 1 door cooler. Call Dick or Mark at Campus Mobil (517) 332-2797.

Repair shop—with auto sales. Four bays and two hoists with large office. Located on corner lot on the west side of Flint. Call (810) 233-9399.


Station—3 bay car wash and convenience store with gas, diesel, K-1, beer and wine. Lotto and more. Port Hope, MI. Call (517) 428-4441.

Wanted

Stations to buy—Looking for stations within 50 miles of Detroit. Please contact Jerry or Jim at Jericko and Sons at (810) 647-0770 or page at (810) 704-7133.

If you are interested in buying or selling an existing service station or equipment, please call the SSDA at 517-484-4096. We are keeping a running list of sellers and buyers.
New Benefit

New employee screening program receives favorable reviews from dealers

Preventing future employment related headaches is one reason two SSDA members cited as to why they used the CRIS Information Services, Inc. Employment Screening program.

The new program, announced in the January edition of the Service Monthly newsletter, offers participating SSDA members a discounted rate on a variety of investigative options to verify job applicant’s qualifications and backgrounds. Some of the reports that can be obtained include a locator search to verify previous addresses, an employment history, criminal records, driving records, credit histories and drug screening. CRIS provides the necessary authorization and release forms for these checks.

Since its announcement, the program has received favorable reviews from dealers who have used it.

SSDA member Ed Weglarz, owner of Hunter and Oak Amoco in Birmingham, recently used the service to check the background of an applicant being considered for a mechanic’s helper position. “The service was quick and the report CRIS gave me was comprehensive,” said Weglarz. Though the report did not show any negative implications about the applicant, Weglarz said he felt more secure about hiring him after finding out more about him.

Knowing about any overwhelming financial obligations is one of the main reasons Weglarz feels that the searches are important. “It gives you a better picture of the employee if you can know of any problems up front,” Weglarz said. “For example, if an employee needs money deducted from his or her check for personal reasons, you can plan ahead for that.”

Finding out about an applicant’s driving record is also important to Weglarz. “I have one guy with a bad driving record that I just don’t let drive cars, not even in or out of the bays,” Weglarz said. Because of that, the insurance company doesn’t surcharge Weglarz for the employee. “Using the CRIS driving record check enables you to find out this kind of information so you can work around problems before they happen.”

The criminal and civil record checks are equally important to Weglarz. “If a person has a record of fights, disorderly conduct or spouse abuse, I think that bears some concern in a retail business.”

SSDA member Dave Horton started using the CRIS service last fall after hearing an advertisement on WJR radio in Detroit. Horton owns the Southeast Sunoco Sun Mart in Whitmore Lake and the Southeast Marathon Gas Mart in Canton Township.

In the five times Horton has used the service, three of the applicants had negative material in their credit reports and were subsequently not hired. “They seemed really great in the interviews but who is to say that you’re not going to be part of the solution to their financial problems down the line,” said Horton. “Someone I hired last summer took me for $500 before I could get rid of her.”

Discouraged with traditional reference checking that often yielded inaccurate results, Horton said he felt too limited in the information that was available to access. “Employees aren’t going to put their enemies down as personal references and many times companies won’t give you more than employment status verification,” Horton said. “The CRIS reports help put more of the odds on my side.”

The knowledge and security the employee screening program provides are well worth the money according to Horton. “Previously, on my own I could access credit history information, but it cost a lot more than CRIS charges.” Now that SSDA members get reduced rates on CRIS services, Horton said he will be able to save even more money on the company’s services.

Horton rated the overall service CRIS provides as being fast and thorough. “They have always been quick to get the results back to me and I have never had any difficulties,” Horton said. “I’d strongly recommend them to anybody that’s hiring positions where they are exposed to money...of course, they are all exposed to money.”

SSDA is proud to offer this new benefit to SSDA members. To begin using this service, please call the SSDA office and we will mail you an employee screening package along with applications, authorizations, releases and the name of the appropriate person from CRIS who will contact you.

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Welcome to Mayberry

On February 28, 1997, you became a deputy of the Food and Drug Administration. Your task—to make sure no one under the age of 18 purchases tobacco products. In order to make sure this is accomplished, you are required to obtain identification from each person that appears to be under the age of 27.

This deputizing of the public in order to get the FDA's mission accomplished reminds me of deputy Barney Fife and how he would deputize citizens of Mayberry in order to take care of one of his most serious problems. Of course, this meant Otis, Goober and Floyd were promptly deputized. They were sent out with only a mission and some instructions. They were given no tools, no guns, no bullets and no penalties—only that they were new deputies to enforce the law. These are the same circumstances that retailers are now given to enforce the new ban on selling tobacco to minors.

There are going to be "sting" operations from the FDA and possibly from state and local agents under the FDA's requests. If a retailer is found to have sold products to someone under the age of 18, they can be fined $250. What is the penalty for the underage person that bought the tobacco products? It is $0.

If a consumer or an anti-tobacco vigilante had reason to think your business is selling tobacco products to minors, they can call the FDA toll-free number and perform a "sting" operation on your site. The "sting" operations will consist of a 15- or 16-year-old and an adult working together. The youth will attempt to buy the tobacco products with the adult observing. If the tobacco product is sold, a fine will be forthcoming from the FDA.

For the first offense, the FDA now says a warning letter may be issued, the second offense is $250—only for the retailer, not to the person purchasing the tobacco products. A newly created association, Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) announced the formation of a private, citizen army to enforce FDA cigarette rules by reporting retailers who do not require I.D. Recently, an ASH volunteer was asked if he witnessed a clerk refusing to sell cigarettes to a minor, would he report the minor to the FDA for attempting to buy the cigarettes? The volunteer said that he would not.

Once again, we have been called to arms and given no tools just like Barney and his group. We are only to enforce it upon ourselves and if we do not, they have a reminder for us—a $250 fine.

Let's make sure our cashiers and managers know the importance of complying with this law. It is also important that our non-tobacco purchasing customers understand this law and that we are just doing our part to stop underage smoking.

Whatever happened to less regulation and a smaller government?

---

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Service Quarterly March, 1997
1997 SSDA Annual Convention to feature informative workshops and family fun

Improving your business while enjoying the beautiful surroundings of Traverse City will be the goal of the 1997 SSDA Annual Convention to be held August 3-6 at the Park Place Hotel.

Plans are currently being made for informative workshops with knowledgeable speakers on matters that are vital to the gasoline retailing and convenience store industries. These workshops will give attendees hands-on knowledge that they can apply the day they return to work after the convention.

There will also be plenty to do after the meetings. The beautiful waters of Grand Traverse Bay are within walking distance to the Park Place Hotel. The Traverse City area is filled with family activity possibilities including excursions to the Sleeping Bear Dunes, vineyard and orchard tours and shopping at an array of surrounding malls and manufacturer’s outlets. Of course, golfing opportunities abound.

To enroll in the early bird registration drawing, please call the SSDA office at 517-484-4096. Your entry will give you a chance to win a get-away weekend at one of Michigan’s premier destinations while signing up for the premier event of this summer, the 1997 SSDA Annual Convention. Watch for more details in future SSDA mailings and publications.

Park Place Hotel has a lot to offer SSDA Convention attendees

Attendees of the 1997 SSDA Annual Convention will enjoy turn-of-the-century atmosphere with all of today’s amenities when they check-in at the Park Place Hotel.

The hotel offers 140 guest rooms decorated with Victorian furnishings. The hotel’s Health Club features a swimming pool, whirlpool, private men’s and women’s saunas, a weight room and aerobic machines.

Overlooking Grand Traverse Bay and centrally located in downtown Traverse City, the Park Place Hotel offers front-door availability to beautiful beaches, shopping and entertainment.

For more information on how you can attend the 1997 SSDA Annual Convention and to enroll in the early bird drawing, please call the SSDA office at 517-484-4096.

1997 Annual Convention Logo designed by MSU student

The SSDA Annual Convention Committee and the SSDA staff would like to thank Alicia Mertz for her work in creating this year’s Convention logo.

Alicia is a senior at Michigan State University majoring in graphic design. Her illustration was selected from many different works created by her fellow students in a graphic arts class at MSU who were asked to make sketches for the logo.

The logo created by Alicia was chosen because of its reflection of the Traverse City area’s trademark cherry growing industry. The logo will be used on all future 1997 SSDA Annual Convention correspondence and promotional materials. To register for the Convention, please call the SSDA office at 517-484-4096.

Mark your calendars now for the 1997 SSDA Annual Convention!
Lottery Update
Commissioner Bill Martin, Michigan State Lottery

New drawings add mid-day excitement

The launch of "double draws" for the Michigan Lottery Daily 3 and 4 games has been a very successful move. Since debuting December 16, mid-day draws have bolstered overall Daily Game sales and they show no signs of slowing.

The new mid-day draw takes place at 12:59 p.m. and the regular drawing remains at 7:28 p.m.

Through the first four weeks, average weekly sales for both the Daily 3 and Daily 4 games were higher than anticipated, with Daily 3 at $8.1 million and Daily 4 at $5.3 million. Compared to those weekly averages in fiscal 1996, that amounts to increases of 11 percent for Daily 3 and 15 percent for Daily 4.

Loyal Daily Game players have really responded to the new double draws. That means more traffic through your stores, higher sales and increased sales and redemption commissions.

Through 22 weeks of Big Game play, the Michigan Lottery has awarded more than $59.8 million in prizes to Michigan players. Growing jackpots boosted sales in January and February and we expect more big jackpots throughout 1997.

Don't forget to remind your Lottery customers about The Big Game and Michigan Lotto "Smartplay." When a $5 five-wager ticket for the next Lotto drawing is purchased, a free $1 "easy pick" wager-also for the next drawing is automatically produced. Advance wagers are not part of the Smartplay promotion. The promotion continues in 1997, after having made two lucky Lotto players millions of dollars richer in 1996. Twice last year, it was the Smartplay wager that matched all six numbers for the Lotto jackpot. Ask your customers if they'd like to play it smart for the next Lotto drawing; it might just be their ticket to Lotto's millions!

The Michigan Lottery is celebrating its 25th Anniversary and is sharing the celebration with lottery players.

Promotional materials remind Daily 3 & 4 Game players of the new mid-day drawings.

SOME FACTS SIMPLY CAN'T BE IGNORED!!

FACT 1 The MUSTFA program is gone.
FACT 2 Most Contamination problems aren't gone.
FACT 3 New RBCA regulations allow 70% of contaminated sites to be closed without further remediation.

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Giving tank owners the security they need through insurance

If you ask Roger Brunner, president of Specialty and Environmental Administrators (S & EA), how underground storage tank owners can feel secure about their tank insurance he'll tell you one thing—its Simpol.

S & EA has been distributing Simpol, a storage tank pollution liability insurance policy, since 1992. S & EA distributes the policy for the Zurich-American Insurance Company to more than 500 local insurance agents in Michigan. Zurich has been in business for over 100 years and is one of the 10 largest insurance companies in the world.

Simpol offers tank owners peace of mind when it comes to environmental liability. "As small business owners, dealers work hard—and they don’t want some catastrophe to take away all they have worked for," said Brunner. "Our customers know that we will be there if they have a problem—and that’s what they need."

In addition to security, S & EA provides answers to tank owners’ questions about insurance. "We provide customers with information about what the policy covers, how much it costs, if they should buy it and why they should buy it," said Brunner. "For example, many tank owners are surprised we will insure currently contaminated sites for new leaks if there is enough information about the site."

Varying deductibles, broader defense coverage and overspill coverage also makes Simpol more attractive. Simpol can be bought through dealers’ local insurance agents.

To receive the answers that S & EA provides and the security that comes with Simpol, see their ad on page 9 and call (800) 713-1158.

Beckler Scramstad, Inc.

Offering one-company environmental and civil services

By combining civil engineering capabilities with their environmental compliance abilities, Beckler Scramstad, Inc. (previously Beckler Consultants) is growing to meet industry needs.

Beckler Consultants, owned by Richard Tomich, recently merged with Richard Scramstad’s company, Scramstad and Associates, to form the new company. Beckler Scramstad is located in Livonia and serves clients in Michigan, Ohio and Indiana.

“We now offer a complete package of environmental and civil work,” said Tomich. “If someone is going to build or remodel a station, we can go in and do the environmental and then do the civil engineering for the site plans.”

Satisfying many different requirements to get the job done is one of the main goals of the company. “We have to satisfy not only the client but also make sure we do our work according to the state and local regulations,” Tomich said. “Our primary loyalty is to our clients and it’s in their best interest if we are loyal to the regulatory agencies as well.”

Something Tomich said he is working to overcome is the stigma that was placed on environmental companies because of the abuses that occurred with MUSTFA. "When MUSTFA crashed, a lot of people were angry and there were a lot of environmental companies who were crooks," said Tomich. "Those people are gone now and we are still here serving our customers."

To get the one-company environmental and civil responsibility that Beckler Scramstad, Inc. now offers, please see their ad on page 10 and call their office at (313) 421-6880.
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Giving customers what they want

By Steve Ott

By keeping his stores clean, well stocked and chock-full of flower beds in the summer, Shell dealer John Curtis manages to keep his customers smiling and his stations busy.

John owns three Shell stations in the Benton Harbor region. His Napier Shell and Lakeshore Shell stations are at exits 30 and 23 off I-94 and his Plaza Shell station is located in town at Napier Road and M-139. All of his stations have convenience stores and the Plaza Shell also offers repairs.

John first got into the service station business when he was 19 as the manager of an Amoco station in Watervliet. He took that opportunity to learn about the business and he attended Amoco's dealer training school. When he was 22, John "jumped ship" and bought the Plaza Shell location. After eight successful years at the Plaza location, John built the Lakeshore station. Just two years ago, he added the Napier Shell to his ownership.

Much of the success John has enjoyed comes from listening to his customer's needs. For example, John's c-stores stock a large selection of groceries. "My customers want more than just candy bars and chips," said John. Offering product variety is important to him—the Napier and Lakeshore stations each stock more than fifteen types of cereal. His stores also stock low-fat foods for the growing health conscious population. "Many suppliers say these types of items won't sell in c-stores, and they won't unless you give your customers a chance to buy them," John said. Stocking family size items is another way John has set himself apart from c-store tradition. "Why should people have to buy the ridiculously priced c-store-sized jar of mayonnaise when they can buy the regular-sized jar for just pennies more."

Because he sells so many food items, keeping his stores clean is high on John's priority list. "Customers feel more comfortable shopping and employees feel more comfortable working in a clean environment," said John. His employees must complete a cleaning checklist before the end of each shift and bathrooms are cleaned, not just checked. "If you just say 'check the bathrooms,' the employee might think they are clean when I do not think they are," said John. "You can't see germs."

To keep his employees motivated, John uses an Employee of the Month program. His employees have a specific goal each month that determines who will be selected for recognition. Some examples include who sells the most shamrocks for the local Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) fundraiser and who has the most positive customer comment cards submitted on them. "We try to give them something to work towards," John said. "If we can keep the employees happy and working hard, it creates a good atmosphere for the customers."

The atmosphere outside John's station is pleasing to customers in a
different way. When the blanketing lake effect snows of southwest Michigan stop and Winter's dreary gives way to Spring growth, John's stations will be alive with color from the many flowers he plants each year. "We have something blooming at all times at each store," said John. Each year, there are more than 100 flats of flowers planted at each store. "The flowers make a real difference to my customers."

In addition to his beautiful flower beds, some other ways John makes a difference in his community include sponsoring area youth athletic teams and participating with groups like the MDA. "We try to be community minded, even though two of the stations are highway locations," said John. "You can't depend on highway traffic alone and there are times that you can't be the same price as everyone else in the area, but your customers will remember you because of a couple of special things you did."

Because John’s stations are located so far from Lansing, he depends on SSDA to keep him informed on important legislative and regulatory issues. "It's a great organization that supplies me with the information I need to run my stations." John has been a SSDA member for more than 13 years and he attends the Association's Roundtable Group meetings. Keeping up with the ever-changing environmental requirements is a challenge that John said his SSDA membership has helped him to meet. "There are so many things out there that get pushed through that we would never know about if it wasn’t for the Association."

---

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Law Talk
Mark Cousens, SSDA-MI Legal Counsel

Zoned Out

Zone pricing—dealers hate it. And with good reason. It is invariably unfair.

Dealers who benefit from the pricing scheme one day may suffer from it another day. And no one knows, from day to day, what price they will be paying or how their price compares to the price charged by another dealer. I have yet to meet a dealer who was a supporter of this system.

Dealers view the entire concept as simply illegal. Price discrimination is unlawful, isn't it?

Price discrimination is unlawful. But zone pricing is not, in and of itself, price discrimination. Several court decisions, some more than thirty years old, explain that the use of a zone price does not, without more, violate the law. However, a price zone may violate the law if the price zone is arbitrary, or if the zone is drawn without regard to competition.

The use of a price zone becomes unlawful if the zone results in an injury to competition or if it is not drawn to meet competition. That means that the zone is not permissible if one or more dealers in a price zone are given a favored price and the dealers within a price zone are in competition with each other. Stating this another way, prices within a zone must be uniform.

Price zones may become unlawful in another way. A price zone is illegal if the zone is an excuse to provide support to a favored dealer and the result is that competition is injured. For example, a price zone that is drawn to affect a single dealer would be illegal if that dealer was able to reduce his or her price and other dealers suffered as a result.

The principles of the regulation of zone pricing are clear enough. But potential plaintiffs to a price action are in a classic "catch-22." The problem is that we do not know the zones, when the zones are changed or why the zones are drawn. This leaves dealers with a real dilemma.

A price zone can be challenged under Federal law. But a dealer, or group of dealers, will be appropriately reluctant to challenge the zone unless there is a good chance they will prevail. And they cannot know that they can prevail unless they know what the zones are. But they may not be able to know what the zones are unless they begin litigation. So where do we go from here?

First, dealers should not be passive regarding zone pricing. An effort should be made to track the price zones. DTW information should be gathered carefully and differences between dealers should be noted.

Second, an effort should be made to compel disclosure of pricing zones. Suppliers may contend that this is proprietary information; that it should not be disclosed. But disclosure is precisely what is needed to prevent zones from being drawn in an arbitrary manner.

Third, dealers should not hesitate to consider class-action litigation to challenge a zone in an appropriate situation. The right case, brought at the right time, may chill the arbitrary use of the zones.

Zone pricing is not new. But the increasing use of the practice has had a dramatic, and adverse, impact on competition. No dealer should have to tolerate unwarranted or unfair pricing. But change will only come about with vigilance and effort.
State sets mechanic certification schedule

A new rule amending the Bureau of Automotive Regulation's existing administrative rules on mechanic certification was recently approved by the Michigan Legislature. The rule requires automobile and light truck mechanics certified in the three categories of Engine Tune-Up/Performance, Electrical Systems, and Brakes and Braking Systems to recertify. Mechanics must pass the latest state certification test or show proof of current and appropriate ASE certification or successfully complete a state-approved training program.

Mechanics certified in each of the three categories must comply by the following dates and be recertified every fifth year thereafter:

- Engine Tune-up/Performance: 1998
- Electrical Systems: 1999
- Brakes and Braking Systems: 2000

Any mechanic unable to meet the recertification requirements may qualify for a trainee permit.

State Minimum wage increased

Legislation to raise Michigan's minimum wage was recently signed into law by Governor John Engler. The new law will raise the state minimum wage from $3.35 to $4.75 on May 1, then to $5.15 on Sept. 1. Only businesses that gross less than $500,000 a year and do not do out of state business are eligible to pay the state minimum wage—otherwise the federal wage applies.

According to federal labor officials, accepting credit cards is a form of out of state business, so few, if any, service stations or c-stores are eligible to pay this state wage.

The new state law will also raise the base salary for tipped employees such as waiters from $2.52 per hour to $2.65. The law also allows employers to pay new employees (up to 90 days) a $4.25 per hour training wage.

Tax stamp legislation passes Senate

Legislation that would require a Michigan Tax Stamp on all cigarettes sold in Michigan (Senate Bill 101) has passed in the Senate and is awaiting action in the House.

The bill attempts to stop the importation of cigarettes from states that have a very low tobacco tax. The bill's proponents estimate Michigan loses over $140 million from this smuggling annually. This bill requires cigarette wholesalers to place a tax stamp on all packs of cigarettes before they are sold. Wholesalers would also receive an additional half percent of the tax to affix the stamp. This provision held the bill up when it was introduced last year. The Governor's office does not support the bill with that provision.

Refer to upcoming issues of Service Monthly for more information on this legislation as it develops.
Q. What can the SSDA do for me?

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• Give you additional promotional points toward Tire Wholesalers programs, as a Tire Wholesalers customer and SSDA member.

• Host an annual convention each year filled with business advantages and entertainment.

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• Make sure your voice is heard in Lansing with an active legislative support network and PAC.

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• Invite you to join a network of hundreds of other dedicated professionals in the industry who can help with advice and support.

The SSDA CAN PROVIDE YOU WITH THE KNOWLEDGE YOU NEED AND THE SAVINGS YOU WANT.

Please send the application below to SSDA, 200 N. Capitol Suite 420, Lansing, MI 48933

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

I (we), by submitting this application and the payment of scheduled dues, hereby apply for membership in the Service Station Dealers Association of Michigan, Inc.

BUSINESS NAME: ______________________________

BUSINESS ADDRESS: ____________________________________________

CITY: ______________________________ MI ZIP: __________ PHONE: ( )

COUNTY: ______________________________ TYPE OF OWNERSHIP: ☐ CORPORATE ☐ NON-CORPORATE

SOLE PROPRIETORSHIP PARTNERSHIP

ENCLOSED PLEASE FIND A CHECK FOR ______________________________

PLEASE CHARGE MY MEMBERSHIP TO MY MC OR VISA (PLEASE CIRCLE ONE) CARD # AND EXP. DATE ______________________________

PLEASE BILL ME

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES:

☐ $41 monthly (electronic banking) ☐ $480 annual payment

☐ $25 monthly (electronic banking) ☐ $250 annual payment

Add $120 per station after four stations.

Signature ______________________________ Date ______________________________

March 1997 SQ
Are you maximizing profits?

The methods used for gasoline profit management differ for the convenience store and the full service dealer. Since the c-store is the simplest, we will start with that analysis.

Since c-store ancillary sales are measured in sales per gallon, and those ancillary profits are referred to in cents per gallon, it is easy to see the direct relationship between gasoline volume and ancillary sales volume (i.e., fewer gallons mean fewer customers means fewer ancillary sales means lower gross profit at an alarming rate). If the pool margin on gasoline volume is 8 cents per gallon, and ancillary sales produce an additional 8.4 cents per gallon in gross profit, we can readily see that each gallon sold is worth 16.4 cents and a disruption in gasoline volume to 131,250 gallons. If the pool margin on gasoline volume is 8 cents per gallon, and ancillary sales produce an additional 8.4 cents per gallon in gross profit, we can readily see that each gallon sold is worth 16.4 cents and a disruption in gasoline volume to 131,250 gallons.

If the c-store operator with a $19,970 profit demand makes 18.4 cents in combined gross profit on a gallon of gasoline, it stands to reason that he needs to sell 108,552 gallons in a month. As shifts take place in profit demand, ancillary sales, ancillary sales margins and gasoline volume offsetting changes can or should be made in pool margin. Using the prior example, should profit demand rise to $21,000 and volume drop to 105,000, combined gross profits must be adjusted to 20 cents per gallon or the decision to lower the combined gross profit to 16 cents would demand a resulting increase in volume to 131,250 gallons.

On the other hand, the full service dealer needs to manage gasoline and ancillary sales separately from oil, TBA, labor and road service sales, since those categories of activity can be separately influenced in a way that would diminish or neutralize any effect gasoline volume variation would have on their sales levels. The key to the six product (3 products x 2 methods of selling—full serve and self serve) pooled analysis is to measure the results of each day's profit contribution toward a longer term TREND. I suggest using a 30 day period so your results will be tied to your monthly operating statement results. While daily profit results assist in your preview of your gasoline marketing profits, it falls short of your "need-to-know" in TREND long term projections, and is daily influenced by day-of-the-week, weather and other extemporaneous factors. While these variations will always be there, they must be seen in the light of a larger picture and therefore the necessity to measure TRENDS.

To get TRENDS, using the monthly time frame, measure how much "spendable" profit will come from gasoline by the end of the month. Based upon the results of the profits of the accumulating days of the month. Each day's profits added together and divided by the number of days in the test, and then multiplied by the number of days in the month will tell you where you would end up in profit by the end of the month at the rate you are going.

- Gasoline profits for 7 days of $2,865 = $12,278 by month end.
- 8 days of $3,249 = $12,183 by month end.
- 9 days of $3,249 = $12,073 by month end.
- 10 days of $4,011 = $12,033 by month end.

Since this example indicates TREND towards reduced profit results during the selected time period of 30 days, it also indicates some need to adjust pricing to reverse this TREND. This could entail price increases in certain products as well as possible decreases to promote volume to overcome drops in "spendable." Note, however, that the number of gallons pumped do not enter into this formula but instead are addresses as a result of marketing to maximize profits. Volume could go up or down during the pricing maneuvers necessary to enhance gasoline spendable profit.

The idea is to maximize see business pg. 22

SSDA-MI members shared $163,604 in Dodson dividends last year.

Endorsed by Service Station Dealers Association of Michigan since 1962, the Dodson Plan gives association members the opportunity to earn dividends each year on their workers' compensation insurance.

Because SSDAM members are promoting job safety and keeping claim costs low, dividends have been earned every year since 1962.

In fact, more than $750,000 in dividends has been returned to insured SSDAM members in the last five years alone!

You, too, can share in the savings . . . Call Dodson today!

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DODSON GROUP

SERVICE QUARTERLY  March, 1997
19
Airbags present new repair challenges

With the recent publicity concerning air bag systems and their effectiveness, it may be time to look at what air bags are, what they actually do and how to service them safely.

Air bag systems are designed to deploy a split second after impact to cushion the driver or front seat passenger so as to avoid serious injury. Air bag sensors mounted near the front of the vehicle and in the passenger compartment constantly monitor vehicle speed and look for conditions that would alert the air bag system that an impact has occurred. When the system sees that frontal impact has occurred and that vehicle speed is also sufficient, the air bag computer electronically triggers a small chemical explosion in the air bag module. This explosion causes rapid inflation of the air bag, thus cushioning the driver and/or passenger from serious injury. Sounds good in principle and actually, it works very well as designed, but, there are several factors that come into play if the system is to function properly and protect the driver and front seat passenger.

The driver and passenger must be wearing safety belts at all times. The seat belt plays an integral part in keeping the occupants in the right position so the air bag can deploy and cushion the driver instead of injuring him or her. Under no circumstances should a young child or infant be placed on the passenger side front seat if the vehicle has a passenger side air bag. Deployment of the air bag can cause severe injury.

Air bags are designed to deploy in frontal collisions only. That means if the vehicle is rear ended or gets a severe impact from the side, the air bag is designed not to deploy! The vehicle must also be above a certain speed, usually 30 mph, before the air bag will deploy.

Air bags can work effectively and they certainly save lives every day, but it is up to motorists and technicians alike to make sure that these systems are functioning properly, and that they are repaired correctly. Because of safety concerns and liability issues, it is important that technicians know how to detect air bag system problems, and avoid accidental air bag deployment. Here are a few tips:

- All vehicles with air bags have an air bag light or a SIR. (Supplemental Inflatable Restraint), light. This is the system warning light. When the ignition is first turned on, the light should come on then go out after several seconds if the system is functioning properly. A steady light or a constantly flashing light indicates an air bag system problem. Consult the manufacturer’s service manual for details on how to check for trouble codes and how to make repairs.
- Watch for yellow or orange colored wiring harnesses in vehicles. The yellow or orange color indicates that they are part of the air bag system wiring. Never ground, induce voltage, hook up a test light or use a DVOM on these circuits unless specifically told to do so by the service manual. Make sure DVOM’s and test lights have the proper impedance when directed to use them.

see Airbags pg. 22
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-Tim Mariner
SSDA member
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Please call 1-800-722-WASH
to learn more about how a Hanna-Sherman car wash can benefit your business.
Airbags

- Never repair air bag system wiring. Harnesses are designed to disconnect in sections. Replace the section that is damaged.
- When disconnecting the steering column during repairs such as steering rack replacement or engine replacement, always lock the steering column by removing the key. If the steering wheel is turned while the column is disconnected, clock spring damage will most likely occur, usually ending up with a costly repair.
- When servicing air bag systems and replacing components, follow the manufacturer’s procedures explicitly. Replace all components that are required. Many air bag components cannot be used again after deployment even though they look good. Make sure to position components properly and torque to proper specifications.
- Use extreme caution when handling and installing air bag modules. Improper repair procedures can cause accidental air bag deployment. Do not drop air bag modules as that may also cause deployment.
- Air bag system repairs can be extremely expensive. Many components contain gold contacts and sophisticated electrical circuits. Proper repairs to restore an air bag system to proper working order can cost an average up to $1500 on domestic vehicles and up to $3000 on import vehicles. Vehicles with dual air bags can cost significantly more. This is another reason why proper service techniques need to be followed. One accidental air bag deployment can be very costly.

It is interesting to note that since there have been several infant deaths reported due to the passenger side air bag deploying with the infant riding in the passenger front seat, legislators and vehicle manufacturers are looking at allowing the driver to have direct control over the air bag system.

One system that may show up on future vehicles contains a switch which allows the driver to disable the air bag system. The system could be disabled with the driver putting the ignition key in a separate switch. This would allow the driver the choice to enable or disable the air bag system each time he or she gets in the vehicle.

No matter how you feel about air bag systems, the fact is that there are millions of these systems on the road today. Many systems are in need of repair or have been repaired improperly. With a good scan tool, a good information source, and some basic electrical tools, air bag system repairs can be safe and very profitable. Are you ready to get your share of air bag system repairs?

Business

profit for the sake of profit, not gallons for the sake of gallons.

Since finding gasoline “spendable” differs slightly from pool margin because it includes a variable sales tax into the cost of gasoline, it makes that formula a little more complex. In the past we used work sheets to measure our TREND. Today, you use a computer template and can have it built just for your operation. If you have Windows 95 and use Microsoft Office Excel, then we can assist you in developing your template. It’s a valuable exercise to check your TREND and should assist you in maximizing gasoline profits.

You can contact us to help you with your TREND line by asking for Larry at (810) 547-3141.
Dodson to return 16 percent dividend

On March 3, 1997, the Dodson Group announced that the 1996 premium dividend for the SSDA workers' compensation program will be 16 percent.

The announced premium dividend was for the period between November 1, 1995, and November 1, 1996.

Those participating in the SSDA Dodson program benefit from very competitive prices, up-front scheduled credits and an excellent premium dividend earned for good claims management. Participating members in good standing should expect to receive their premium dividends in the beginning of April.

Dodson also announced new marketing strategies to lower the up-front costs for workers' compensation insurance. These include increases of scheduled credits and additional credit for good operation. Dodson and SSDA will soon be announcing even more incentives that will help you lower your workers' compensation premiums.

If you are not presently participating in the SSDA program, please call the SSDA office at 517-484-4096 to get a quote. You will be pleasantly surprised. The Dodson Group program is one more example of how it pays to be an SSDA member!

“We Card” from pg. 1

the age of 35 should be requested to show identification. This brings 10 more years of customers into the requirement of being asked for identification. It is very important that we use information such as “We Card” to help our cashiers, our managers and our customers understand why we are asking for this information.

The Food and Drug Administration now is in charge of this program at the Federal level and can fine those selling cigarettes to minors $250 per incident. Also, there are municipalities throughout the state who have their own “sting” operations to try to determine those retail outlets selling tobacco products to minors. Retailers have been put on the front lines of enforcement just because they sell a product. The best thing we can do is comply with the law at this level so that we can divert other municipalities and cities from developing their own rules and regulations. We do not want 83 counties or over one thousand cities enforcing different standards throughout the state.

Let’s all do our part in trying to stop underage smoking by asking, “Under 18? No tobacco because ‘We Card’.” If you would like more information about the “We Card” program, please call the SSDA office at 517-484-4096.

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