

Truck Bed Liners and Portable Gasoline Containers

A man is filling a small gasoline container at a service station. The gasoline container is in the back of a truck bed equipped with a plastic liner. During refueling, the gasoline ignites spontaneously, severely burning the man.

A 3-year-old waits in the front seat of a pickup truck while his dad fills gas cans in the bed of the truck. Suddenly, the back of the truck is in flames. Desperate to get his child, the father tips the gas cans over, burning his hands and further spreading the flames. The father sustained second degree burns on his hands and forearms. He is now fine, as is his son. The truck has been repaired. The gas station was closed for several weeks but now has new pumps.

An unusual number of fires like these have occurred during the filling of portable metal or plastic gasoline containers when the containers are in the backs of pick-up trucks that are equipped with plastic bed liners. What caused these fires? What happened to make this routine chore a disaster? How can similar fires be prevented?

The bed liner isolates the portable container from the metal body of the pickup truck (through which the static charge would normally be dissipated) thus allowing the charge to build and the container to hold the charge. The truck bed liner provides insulation, preventing static electricity from bleeding off of the gas can, to the truck body, through the truck tires, and off to the ground. When the fuel nozzle touches the container, a spark can occur, igniting accumulated gasoline vapors, and causing a fire or explosion. Most of fires involved pick-up trucks that had plastic bed liners. However, reports also describe fires that resulted while portable gasoline containers were being filled in trunks or passenger compartments of vehicles, where carpeting acted as an insulator.

Guidelines to Use When Dispensing Fuel into Portable Gasoline Containers:

- ❑ **Turn off your vehicle engine while fueling.**
- ❑ **Dispense fuel only into an approved portable container.**
- ❑ **Remove the approved container from the vehicle and place it on the ground a safe distance away from the vehicle, other customers, and traffic.**
- ❑ **Do not fill a portable container while it is inside a vehicle, in a vehicle's trunk, in a pick-up bed, or on any other surface other than the ground. This includes pick-up trucks, sports utility trucks, vans, marine crafts, and others.**
- ❑ **Bring the fill nozzle in contact with the inside of the fill opening *before* operating the nozzle. Maintain contact until the filling operation is complete.**
- ❑ **Never use the latch-open device, equipped on dispensing nozzles, to fill a portable container.**
- ❑ **Fill container no more than 95 percent full to allow for expansion.**
- ❑ **Place cap tightly on the container after filling - do not use containers that do not seal properly.**
- ❑ **If gasoline spills on the container, make sure that it has evaporated before you place the container in your vehicle. Report spills to the attendant.**
- ❑ **Don't smoke while pumping gasoline.**
- ❑ **Do not use cell phone while filling the can or vehicle.**