

Is using a phone while pumping gas actually dangerous? Not as much as sitting in your car

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Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Signs on gas pumps across the nation caution "Do not use cell phone while pumping gas" or "Turn off cellular phone," but is there a real danger to talking or texting on your phone while pumping gas? Could it cause an explosion?

"The risk is very, very low," Michael Marando, staff liaison for the National Fire Protection Association, told U.S. TODAY.

Marando said he does not know when the warnings began to appear or why they started, but the consensus reasoning was that a [cell phone](#) had enough energy to create a spark, and when mixed with flammable gasoline, it could cause a fire, resulting in severe, even life-threatening injuries.

Researchers tested the theory numerous times to see if the urban legend was fact. It never worked.

"So far, we have been unable to document any

incidents that were sparked by a cellular telephone. In fact, many researchers have tried to ignite fuel vapors with a cell phone and failed," says the Petroleum Equipment Institute, citing multiple studies. The show "Mythbusters" even once tried to do it, to no avail, and the Federal Trade Commission also denounced the theory.

Even though experiments haven't ignited a spark, Marando said it is still somewhat possible.

"For me to say there's no risk, I can't really do that, because there could be some really, really one-in-a-several billion chance that it could possibly happen," he said. "There's just there's too many factors that have to line up that it's extraordinarily rare."

The real worry of using your phone while pumping gas

Marando said the main reason why people shouldn't use their phone while getting gas—and why signs might still exist—is because, like when driving, it's a distraction. The biggest worry is if the pump isn't properly put into the car, or gasoline spills out.

"All of us become a little complacent as to hazards that might be there because we're so used to going to the gas station. It's really to make sure that the people at the gas station are paying attention to refueling, instead of talking on the [cell phone](#)," he said.

Sitting in your car at the pump could cause an explosion

An often overlooked warning that has proven to ignite gas explosions: Don't sit in your car while gas is pumping.

"If you go into the vehicle, and then you sit down in your seat, and then you come back out of the vehicle to touch the gas nozzle, you could create a static charge on you. And that static charge could lead to a spark that could create an ignition," Marando said.

The message is echoed in a report published by the NFPA in August 2021, which highlighted a few incidents where [static electricity](#) was the reason behind an explosion at the gas pump. The Petroleum Equipment Institute also has a "Stop Static Campaign" to raise awareness about the dangers.

Char Carstensen, who used to own a gas station that suffered severe damage due to fire caused by static electricity, told the Bonner County Daily Bee in 2018 if you do re-enter your car, touch the metal of the car before touching the nozzle again. Some gas stations also have notices to touch metal before re-touching the nozzle.

If a fire caused by static breaks out, the the American Petroleum Institute says people should leave the nozzle in, back away from the vehicle and alert the [gas station](#) attendant.

More of what not to do when pumping gas

Here are a list of things not to do while getting gas, according to the American Petroleum Institute.

- Do not keep the engine running, as the hot engine mixed with gas vapors can cause an explosion.
- Do not smoke. Gas vapors you can't see could be ignited.
- Do not 'top off' gas in your gas tank, as it can lead to gas being spilled.
- Do not fill gas in plastic bags. It's not a safe place to store it.

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