

State panel attacks gasoline pump fraud

A forfeiture law to punish gasoline pump racketeers and frequent offenders was proposed by a state task force this week.

The law, if passed, would be aimed at patterns of racketeering and recurring offenses at the same location, Attorney General Frank Kelley said.

Kelley sent the final report of the Blue Ribbon Motor Fuel Accountability Task Force to Gov. James J. Blanchard.

The report explains the scope of problems encountered by state motorists who have been defrauded by unscrupulous sales tactics and tax evasion.

The panel was set up in April to develop a coordinated strategy among government and private industry to combat the multimillion-dollar problem of gasoline fraud in Michigan.

THE REPORT was prepared by the attorney general's office with the

cooperation of other state agencies. These include: the state treasurer; the Department of Agriculture; Department of State Police; state Sen. Richard Fessler, R-West Bloomfield, who chairs the Senate Transportation Committee; State Rep. Curtis Herrel, D-Detroit, who chairs the House Transportation Committee; and Wayne County Prosecutor John O'Hair.

Private agencies include: the Service Station Dealers of Michigan; the

Associated Petroleum Industries of Michigan; the Michigan Petroleum Association; and the Automobile Club of Michigan.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS to alleviate a problem that is costing consumers tens of millions of dollars each year include:

- Enactment of a nuisance padlock provision where a facility can be closed if law enforcement officials have reasonable cause to believe state law is being violated.

- Development of a computer watch of sales data of the major oil companies and wholesalers and retailers to monitor the industry.
- A substantial increase in the number of Department of Agriculture inspectors who monitor weights and measures and the motor fuel quality Act.
- Reciprocal agreement between Michigan and other Great Lakes states for information.
- A 24-hour, toll-free number for

all motor and fuel related inquiries staffed by trained personnel.

"THIS IS NOT an easy problem to solve," Kelley said.

"This joint effort between government and the industry, I believe, is a major step in providing a workable solution to this most expensive consumer problem.

"In the coming months, I am hoping that the Legislature will take a hard look at the problem and pass the bills needed to get the job done."



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