



News Release

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AAA IDENTIFIES MOTORIST BREAKING POINT ON GAS PRICES IN NEW CONSUMER INDEX

Nearly two-thirds of consumers offset high gas prices with driving or lifestyle changes

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va., (April 18, 2013) – Half of U.S. adults consider gas prices to be “too high” when it reaches \$3.44 per gallon, indicating a potential breaking point on gas prices, according to a new consumer price index developed by AAA. Roughly two-thirds of Americans (62 percent) are offsetting high gas prices by changing their driving habits or lifestyle.

“It was not long ago that motorists were shocked to pay more than \$3 per gallon for gasoline, but now that is standard at stations nationwide,” said Georjeane Blumling, Ph.D. Vice President, Public Affairs for AAA Tidewater. “Today’s average consumer feels a breaking point on high gas prices closer to \$3.50 per gallon, and expensive prices have forced many motorists to change their driving habits.”

AAA’s gas-price index tracks consumer attitudes by determining at what price the cost of gasoline becomes too high. The results from the open-ended survey demonstrate how attitudes can be expected to change as prices rise above significant milestones:

- 46 percent believe gas is too high when the price reaches \$3.00 per gallon
- 61 percent believe gas is too high when the price reaches \$3.50 per gallon
- 90 percent believe gas is too high when the price reaches \$4.00 per gallon

“It is possible there is a new normal in terms of consumer attitudes now that gas prices have remained above \$3 per gallon for more than two years,” continued Blumling. “Most people have resigned themselves to paying higher gas prices and are cutting back on driving, shopping and dining out to save money.”

Consumers report changing their driving habits or lifestyle in a number of ways to offset recent gas prices, including:

- Driving less – 86 percent
- Reducing shopping or dining out – 71 percent
- Driving a more fuel efficient car – 54 percent
- Delaying major purchases – 53 percent
- Working closer to home – 39 percent
- Carpooling – 33 percent
- Using public transportation more regularly – 15 percent
- Other – 18 percent

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Younger consumers ages 18-34 are more likely to offset recent gas prices by working closer to home or using public transportation more regularly than adults ages 35 and up (48 percent vs. 35 percent and 25 percent vs. 10 percent, respectively). These results could suggest a generational shift in terms of attitudes towards driving, but it is too early to say whether these attitudes would continue into the future.

Today's national average price of gasoline is \$3.51 per gallon, but prices currently vary by more than \$1 per gallon nationwide. The national average has remained above \$3.00 per gallon for 28 consecutive months. While the national average has not surpassed \$4.00 per gallon since 2008, it is not uncommon for motorists living in the West Coast, Northeast and near the Great Lakes to pay more than \$4.00 per gallon.

AAA developed the price index by asking respondents, "At what price do you start to consider the cost of gasoline to be too high? Please tell me the price per gallon to the nearest ten cents." AAA combined the answers from 974 respondents to determine the potential consumer breaking point for high gas prices.

This report presents the findings of a telephone survey conducted among two national probability samples (landline only and cell phone), consisting of a combined total of 1,011 adults (503 men and 508 women), 18 years of age and older and living in the continental United States. Interviewing for this survey was conducted on March 28-30. The total included 661 interviews from the landline sample and 350 interviews from the cell phone sample. This study has a 95 percent margin of error of ± 3.8 percent.

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