NYS ASSOCIATION OF SERVICE STATIONS & REPAIR SHOPS, INC.

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Judge Signals Dismissal of Swipe Fee Settlement

The proposed $30 billion settlement of a class-action antitrust lawsuit over credit and debit card fees charged to merchants appears to face imminent dismissal.

During a June 13 hearing held by the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York, Judge Margo Brodie stated that she will "likely not" approve the settlement, which has garnered a significant number of objections from retail industry groups.

Judge Brodie will write an opinion explaining her decision and reasoning, reported Reuters.

Objectors to the settlement, which included the National Retail Federation, the Merchants Payments Coalition (MPC) and NACS among others, previously criticized it for providing only short-term relief and freeing Visa and Mastercard to raise swipe fee rates without limit after five years.

Under the terms of the proposed settlement, Visa and Mastercard would reduce rates for each swipe fee category by 4 basis points (0.04 of 1 percentage point) for three years and average rates by 7 basis points for five years. However, because credit card swipe fees currently average 2.26% of the transaction or 226 basis points, many trade groups view the relief as insufficient.

The MPC applauded news of the settlement's likely rejection, calling the deal a "sham" that would have locked in cartel pricing and made the situation worse.

"The judge made a strong statement in support of justice for merchants and consumers," said MPC Executive Committee member and National Grocers Association Senior Vice President of Government Relations and Counsel Christopher Jones. "We appreciate that there was recognition of the fatal flaws that would have made the settlement a bad deal for Main Street rather than a correction of credit card industry violations of the antitrust laws. It’s past time for Congress to pass the Credit Card Competition Act to fix this broken market."

Federal Right-to-Repair Bill Gains Two Co-Sponsors

The REPAIR Act continues to build momentum with two more co-sponsors signing onto the bill, reports Land Line.

HR906–also known as the Right to Equitable Professional Auto Industry Repair (REPAIR) Act–was first introduced last year by Rep. Neal Dunn, R-Florida, and would require manufacturers to let vehicle owners access data from their car.

The bill gained two new supporters last week: Reps. Elise Stefanik, R-New York and Bill Foster, D-Illinois. With the addition of Stefanik and Foster, the REPAIR Act now has a total of 54 co-sponsors, comprised of 27 Democrats and 27 Republicans.

"By prohibiting vehicle owners from accessing and sharing data they generate, manufacturers stop consumers from accessing third-party repair shops," stated Rep. Warren Davidson, R-Ohio, one of the bill's original co-sponsors. "American vehicle owners have a right to control their data, and a right to access third-party repair shops, tools and parts."

So what can you do? The ACA has created a website

http://www.repairact.com

which automatically sends your legislators an email requesting their support of the bill. It also contains support materials for your customers. *The last attachment of this newsletter is a flyer that we have created for you to hand-out to your customers. It requests that they go to the website to support the bill as well.*

Federal Agencies Join Forces to Fight Sales of Illegal Vapor Products

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) created a federal multiagency task force to combat the illegal distribution and sale of e-cigarettes, especially targeting products that appeal to young people.

Multiple law enforcement partners will assist with the new investigatory team, including the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF); the U.S. Marshals Service (USMS); the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS); and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). Agency partners will help coordinate and streamline efforts to bring all available criminal and civil tools to bear against the illegal distribution, with additional agencies possibly joining the task force in the coming weeks and months.

The task force will focus on several topics, including investigating and prosecuting new criminal, civil, seizure and forfeiture actions under the Prevent All Cigarette Trafficking Act (PACT Act); the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act, and other authorities. Violations of these statutes can result in felony convictions and significant criminal fines and civil monetary penalties. They can also result in seizures of unauthorized products.

Through their participation in the task force, the USMS will help the FDA and the DOJ effectuate such seizures, while coordination with the ATF and USPIS could result in potential criminal and civil enforcement actions.

Finally, the FTC, which releases reports about tobacco marketing, will support the activities of the task force, including by sharing its knowledge about the marketplace for vaping products.

The 2023 National Youth Tobacco Survey found that about 2.1 million youths reported currently using e-cigarettes, which reflects a considerable decline from 5.3 million youth in 2019. However, 10% of high school students and almost 5 percent of middle school students reported currently using e-cigarettes. According to the Center for Disease Control, youth use of tobacco products in any form — including e-cigarettes — is unsafe.

To date, the FDA has issued more than 1,100 warning letters to manufacturers, importers, distributors and retailers for illegally selling and/or distributing unauthorized new tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, and has filed civil money penalty complaints against more than 55 manufacturers and 140 retailers.

The FDA currently authorizes the sale of 23 specific tobacco-flavored e-cigarette products and devices, a full list of which may be found via the agency's Searchable Tobacco Products Database.

EIA Says US March Gasoline Demand Dropped by 120,000 b/d Year to Year

U.S. gasoline demand averaged 8.887 million b/d in March, down 120,000 b/d from the same month of last year, the Energy Information Administration said Friday in its latest Petroleum Supply Monthly report.

The report also trimmed the March domestic demand number of 8.931 million b/d contained in the agency's weekly data reports for the month. March demand was about 286,000 b/d higher than February.

Friday's data suggests the U.S. automotive fleet is continuing to become more efficient even as the amount of driving increases. The Federal Highway Administration earlier this month reported U.S. motorists drove 275.5 billion miles in March, up 0.7% year-to-year. It was the 11th year-to-year monthly increase in the past 12 months.

EIA weekly reports issued this year through Thursday put U.S. gasoline demand so far this year at 8.651 million b/d, down from 8.772 million b/d, over the comparable period last year.

The 1.4% year-to-year drop in consumption, however, may be misleading, market sources said. Gasoline sales by big box retailers and supermarkets are up year to year, but smaller branded and unbranded chains are reporting demand drops of about 3-5%.

Retail prices in March averaged $3.4518/gal, up modestly from an average of $3.4417 in March 2023.

--Reporting by Tom Kloza

EPA UST Survey On Compliance With Environmental Regulations

Last month the EPA released its annual report on UST environmental regulations. According to the report there were aa total of 534,534 UST systems nationwide over the period of April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024. A total of 39,002 inspections were performed on UST systems nationwide.

The survey found that only 59.7 % of the systems were in technical compliance. Compliance rates in the four categories were as follows:

- 82.2% -- spill protection
- 82.1% -- overfill protection
- 89.2% -- corrosion protection
- 70.4% -- releasee detection

Additionally, 86.5% were in compliance with A/B training requirements, 90.3% met their financial responsibility, and 81.0% completed required walkthroughs.

A total of 1945 confirmed relases were reported. 2988 sites had completed cleanup, and 56432 sites remained to be cleaned.

Less information was available on a statewide level. However the following numbers were available for New York State. There were 1,067 inspections performed on a total of 22,125 UST systems. Only 63% were in total technical compliance, with 69% having appropriate leak detection measures.

With huge fines capable of being levied, it is important to bring your systems in compliance today. For more information on compliance requirements go to the NYS DEC website at https://dec.ny.gov/environmental-protection/hazardous-substance-bulk-storage .

US Gasoline Price Index Falls After Months of Increases

The U.S. index for gasoline prices fell 3.6% in May after three months of increases, though the index rose 2.2% year to year, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in an update on Wednesday.

The decline in gasoline prices led a decrease in the overall energy index, which declined by 2% in May, but rose 3.7% year to year. Indexes for all energy products declined last month, except for electricity, which was level with the prior month and up 5.9% year to year.

The index for fuel oil declined 0.4% in May, but rose 3.6% year to year, and gas utility prices declined 0.8% in May, rising 0.2% year to year, the bureau reported.

The Consumer Price Index was unchanged in May after rising 0.3% in April. Year to year, the CPI rose 3.3%, a smaller increase than the 3.4% hike seen for the 12 months ending in April.

Housing prices more than offset the decline in gasoline in May, up 0.4% for the fourth consecutive month, the bureau said.

--Reporting by Donna Harris

Average US Gasoline and Diesel Rack-to-Retail Margins Hit 2024 High in May

May was a good month for filling station operators around the country as average gross rack-to-retail margins around the country climbed to the highest levels in six months, OPIS data show.

U.S. gasoline margins averaged 45.9cts/gal in May, 9cts higher than the next-highest 2024 average of 36.9cts/gal seen in January and the highest since November's 46.7cts/gal average, according to OPIS MarginPro data.

Diesel margins for the month averaged 70cts/gal, 7.6cts higher than in January and the highest since December's 75.5cts/gal average, OPIS data show.

The strength in margins came as the price of gasoline futures fell more than 30.6cts/gal during the month while diesel futures fell 14.4cts/gal. Meanwhile, the national average price of regular unleaded gasoline, which had been $3.6573/gal on April 30, fell 9.86cts to $3.5587/gal on May 31, according to OPIS data. Average retail diesel prices fell from $4.0077/gal to $3.8729/gal, a 13.48ct decline over the month.

Retail diesel prices during the month had reached a low of $3.8633/gal, a point not seen since July. Regionally, gasoline margins during the month ranged from a high of 84.6cts/gal on the Pacific Coast to 37cts/gal in the Southeast. Gas margins in other regions included 73.8cts/gal in the West, 44.6cts/gal in the Northeast, 43.3cts/gal in the Great Lakes, 42.9cts/gal in the Midwest, 41.2cts/gal in the Rockies and 38.2cts/gal in the Southwest. Margins in most regions were stronger than those seen during the same month last year, with gains ranging from 25cts/gal on the Pacific Coast to 0.14ct/gal in the Southeast. Only the Great Lakes region saw a decline, with the May 2024 average falling 0.03cts/gal below the same time last year.

Average diesel margins ranged from 94.6cts/gal on the Pacific Coast to 46.3cts/gal in the Rockies, with averages in other regions including 89.1cts/gal in the Northeast, 79.5cts/gal in the West, 68.4cts/gal in the Great Lakes, 64.3cts/gal in the Southeast, 61.8cts/gal in the Midwest and 57.3cts/gal in the Southwest. However, only three regions - the Great Lakes, Southwest and Rockies - saw a year-to-year increase in the diesel average margin, with the average rising 0.85ct in the Great Lakes and Southwest and 0.13ct in the Rockies. The other regions saw declines, including 12.1cts/gal in the Northeast, 11.8cts/gal on the Pacific Coast, 0.83ct in the Southeast, 0.78ct in the West and 0.01ct in the Midwest.

The year-to-year increases in gasoline margins provided some relief for retailers, who have seen the volume of gasoline sold so far in 2024 running significantly behind the same period in 2023.

OPIS DemandPro data, which is based on weekly surveys of more than 30,000 retailers nationwide, shows that as of the week ending May 25, year-to-date sales volumes nationally were 5.3% below the same period in 2023. On a regional basis, year-to-date volume deficits include 5.8% for the West and Midcontinent regions, 5.7% for the Southeast, 5.2% for the Northeast and 3% for the Southwest.

--Reporting by Steve Cronin

US April Vehicle Miles Traveled Rise More than 2% Year to Year: DOT

U.S. vehicle miles traveled was solidly higher in April compared to a year ago, extending a recent positive trend, according to the latest data from the Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration.

DOT's Traffic Volume Trends report published Wednesday estimated U.S. drivers traveled 263.9 billion miles in April, up 2.2% compared with April 2023, for a third straight monthly increase on that year-on-year basis.

It was also the highest number for vehicle miles traveled during the month of April since 2016, DOT data showed.

DOT's data showed the North Central - which includes the Midwestern states such as Illinois, Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin - led the other four regions with the biggest gain of 2.7% year to year.

On a seasonally adjusted basis, vehicle miles also climbed 1.4% from those in March.

According to OPIS DemandPro data, which canvasses more than 30,000 gas stations across the U.S., April station gasoline volumes were down 4.2 % year to year.

Improving fuel mileage and more electric vehicles on the road may explain how miles traveled increases even as fuel demand may have fallen. Other factors such as the price at the gas pump also play a role particularly for states like California where fuel is notably higher than average.

--Reporting by Frank Tang

US Gasoline Station Wages Rise, But Below Peak

The average hourly wages for nonmanagerial workers at U.S. retail gasoline stations and retail gasoline stations with convenience stores increased in April but were still lower than the highs reached in January when both exceeded $17/hour, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported Friday in an update.

Wages had declined two months in a row, and the hourly wage average for fuel stations with convenience stores dipped below $17 in March.

But as retailers started hiring for the summer, the average wage for gasoline stations rose to $17.22, up 10cts from March and 54cts, or 3.2%, from a year earlier. The average wage for gasoline stations with convenience stores increased to $17.01, up 8cts from March and 51cts, or 3.1% from the prior year, the bureau's figures show.

The April figures are not seasonally adjusted.

Gasoline station wages exceeded $17/hour for the first time in December at $17.10. Both fuel stations and stations with c-stores exceeded $17/hour in January, peaking at $17.27 for gasoline stations and $17.15 for stations with c-stores.

The average hourly wage for nonmanagerial workers across all retail businesses has increased in each of the last four months, the bureau's data show. In May, the average retail worker made $21.00 hourly, up from $20.93 in April, $20.81 in March and $20.69 in February.

Rival channels that already pay better hourly rates than gasoline stations and convenience stores raised their pay in April. The average supermarket wage was $17.67, up from $17.62 in March and 4.6% higher than the year-ago $16.89. The average wage at liquor stores was $17.73, up from $17.58 in March and 3.7% higher than the year-ago $17.10, the bureau's numbers show.

But the statistics suggest gasoline stations are paying better than fast food restaurants, though the "limited-service" restaurant category increased hourly wages 25cts month to month in April to an average $16.10, and April wages rose 4.5% from $15.41 a year ago.

--Reporting by Donna Harris

Convenience Store News Industry Report 2024

Heading into 2023, inflation, the ongoing labor shortage and motor fuel prices had convenience store retailers worried about their business prospects for the year ahead. It turns out they had cause for concern.

After hitting record-high sales in 2022, total U.S. convenience store sales declined 4.7% in 2023, going from $814 billion to $775.5 billion, according to the 2024 Convenience Store News Industry Report, the longest-running annual analysis of U.S. c-store industry performance.

For the third consecutive year, in-store sales at U.S. convenience stores hit a new high of $287.7 billion last year, up 4.5% over the prior year. Much of that increase, however, was due to inflation pushing product prices higher throughout 2023. The consumer price index, which measures price changes over time, was 5.7% for the year, down slightly from 6.5% in 2022.

In-store sales growth also came from a 1.5% increase in the industry’s store count, which now stands at 152,396 locations. Chains account for 39.8%, while single stores comprise 60.2%. The number of industry locations operated by chains rose 1.4% year over year, while the number of stores operated by single-store operators ticked up by 1.5%.

The chief contributor to the overall sales decline was motor fuels. Fuel volume grew slightly, with gallons up 1.4% for the year. But lower gas prices drove the industry’s 2023 fuel revenue to decrease by 9.4%, going from $538.7 billion to $487.8 billion.

As a result, the convenience store industry’s sales mix for 2023 still skewed more toward motor fuels, but in-store sales captured a larger slice of the pie than a year ago. In-store comprised 37.1%, up from 33.8% in 2022. Fuel comprised 62.9%, down from 66.2%.

EV Charging Stations Effect on Consumers Choice

The presence of EV charging stations is becoming a significant factor for younger consumers. In a recent survey 34% of consumers aged 18-44 said they would frequent a convenience store with EV chargers over those without. 40% of those age 18-24 said they would choose a location based on EV charging .

Meanwhile only 14% of those over 45 said that they would prefer a store with EV chargers, and only 6% of those age 65-74 said they would frequent a store with EV charging capabilities over one without

Electricity Use by EVs Surpassed That by Rail for First Time in 2023: EIA

Electricity use by light-duty vehicles in 2023 in the U.S. for the first time surpassed that used annually by rail systems, as the increase in EV usage leads to a corresponding surge in energy demand, according to estimates by the Energy Information Administration.

EIA estimates annual energy consumption by EVs totaled 7,596 gigawatt hours for the year, a nearly fivefold increase from 2018 and more than the 7,000 GWh used by railways during the same period.

Railways have topped the list of largest electricity end-users in the transportation sector since 2003, with total consumption remaining relatively stable through that period, according to EIA.

Meanwhile, EVs have seen their share of new vehicle sales rise in recent years, with combined sales of hybrid vehicles, plug-in hybrid electric vehicles, and battery electric vehicles making up 16.3% of new LDV sales in 2023, EIA has said, citing data from Wards Intelligence.

Last year, battery electric vehicles were responsible for about 72% of electricity consumed by EVs, according to EIA.

A large amount of the electric consumption by vehicles is taking place on the West Coast, reflecting the popularity of EVs in that region. EIA estimates the Pacific region - which includes Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon and Washington - accounted for 40% of U.S. electricity consumption by EVs last year, with California alone accounting for 33.9% of U.S. EV electricity consumption, EIA estimates.

The South Atlantic Census Division - which includes Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia - accounted for 15.5% of consumption by EVs, with Florida posting the second-highest statewide consumption level at 6%.

The Middle Atlantic Census Division - which includes New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania - accounted for 8.8% of total U.S. consumption, according to EIA.

--Reporting by Steve Cronin

Toyota Showcases New, Compact Engines Compatible With Alternative Fuels

At a recent media event, Toyota showcased next-generation engines it's currently developing that could be compatible with a variety of different vehicles, reports Reuters.

The 1.5 liter and 2.0 liter engines that Toyota unveiled yesterday have a volume and weight reduction of 10% compared to its existing 1.5 liter engines, with the new 2.0-liter turbo engine to see similar improvements from the existing 2.4 liter turbo engines.

Having the capability to run with alternative fuels such as e-fuel and biofuel, Toyota hopes for the new technology to help decarbonize internal combustion engines. Its more compact design is also intended to open possibilities for lower hoods in vehicles.

With Toyota owning a fifth of Subaru and around 5% of Mazda, the three companies released a joint statement expressing plans for all of them to pursue the changing technology, though Toyota Chief Technology Officer Hiroki Nakajima could not provide a timeframe for when to expect these new engines on the market.

"With these engines, each of the three companies will aim to optimize integration with motors, batteries, and other electric drive units," the companies said in their joint statement.

U.S. Electric Vehicle Charging Initiative Has Made Little Progress in Three Years

Though a $5-billion U.S. government program to expand electric vehicle charging across the nation was established three years ago, only seven stations have been deployed since its inception, reports Reuters.

The seven charging stations are equipped with a combined total of a few dozen charging ports, according to Shailen Bhatt, head of the Federal Highway Administration (FHA).

When this information was disclosed during a recent Senate Environment and Public Works committee hearing, it prompted Senator Jeff Merkley to express harsh disappointment.

"That is pathetic. We're now three years into this ... That is a vast administrative failure," remarked Merkley. "Something is terribly wrong and it needs to be fixed."

Merkley continued to criticize existing federal highway rules preventing EV charging stations from being placed at rest stops. Bhatt concurred, adding that FHA is working with states on formulating plans for EV charger development, though it can be difficult when states are handling multiple programs.

The U.S. had 183,000 public charging ports as of December. Since the beginning of Biden's administration, there's been a 90% increase in the number of fast charging ports. The government's current goal is to expand the number of charging ports to 500,000, placed no more than 50 miles apart.

According to Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm, 27 states have submitted commercial requests for EV charging stations, and 1,000 in public spaces are expected to launch by the end of the year. With many of the proposed areas not yet having access to electricity, obstacles still remain–but Bhatt affirmed that the U.S. will meet its goal for EV chargers regardless.

Study: U.S. Consumers Not Willing to Purchase Electric Vehicle Over Hybrid or Gas-Powered

A recent study shows that most Americans aren't yet ready to choose electric vehicles over internal combustion engines, according to ET Auto.

KPMG's American Perspectives Survey of 1,100 U.S. adults nationwide found that only one-fifth of respondents would purchase an EV over a hybrid or gas-powered car, even if the price and features offered are the same.

60% of respondents said that they want EVs to charge in 20 minutes or less, while 41% said they would be willing to wait longer times. It also found that consumers are less interested in paying for self-driving and entertainment features as opposed to safety improvements, Wi-Fi access, and a charging locator.

The study underscores a wane in EV demand, with consumers needing higher quality charging and infrastructure before making the switch. Automakers such as Ford, General Motors, and Mercedes have all announced revisions to their EV strategies in response to the continuing shift in demand.

Consumer Interest in Electric Vehicles Begins to Wane

The most recent annual consumer survey by AAA on electric vehicles (EVs) indicates a decline in consumer interest in purchasing these vehicles.

Only 18% of U.S. adults say they would be "very likely" or "likely" to buy a new or used EV (not a hybrid), down from 23% last year. On top of that, 63% cited "unlikely" or "very unlikely" to purchase an EV for their next car purchase.

"Early adopters who wanted an EV already have one," said Greg Brannon, director of automotive research at AAA. "The remaining group of people who have yet to adopt EVs consider the practicality, cost, convenience and ownership experience, and for some, those are big enough hurdles to keep them from making the jump to fully electric."

AAA found the main hesitations in purchasing an EV continue to be cost, lack of convenient charging options and range anxiety. Three in 10 respondents also cited the inability to install a charging station where they live, an on-going issue for residents of condos or apartments.

The association believes there may be a near-term ceiling related to consumer adoption of battery electric vehicles due to the above concerns. However, hybrid options could bridge these gaps, broadening consumer interest in owning an EV. The survey found that one in three U.S. adults (31%) say they would be "very likely" or "likely" to buy a hybrid, with drivers expressing less anxiety because it allows people to enjoy the benefits of electrification without feeling like they are disrupting their current lifestyle or long distance travel plans.

Fire Departments Grapple With Controlling EV Battery Fires

With the emergence of electric vehicles, firefighters are grappling with what the best method is to contain battery fires when they break out, reports North Jersey.

This past March, firefighters in Hackensack, New Jersey, had to work for over seven hours to fully extinguish the flames of a battery fire that sparked in a parking garage. It took thousands of gallons of water before the fire was fully tamed, underscoring the intensity of EV fires.

As Hackensack Fire Capt. Peter Rocco explained, an EV battery will continue to generate heat and reignite itself, even after the flames appear to be gone–a process referred to as a thermal runway. Within the battery are thousands of lithium-ion cells that continue to spread heat to other cells, which can cause another fire to break out hours after the initial flames are taken care of.

"You get these reignition issues, where you think the battery fire is out, but it really isn't," said Glenn Corbett, a professor of fire science at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in Manhattan and a volunteer firefighter in Waldwick, New Jersey. "The fire service has to catch up–we have to figure out how do we deal with this. For the most part, there is no standardized process."

What can make it especially difficult is the positioning of the battery within the vehicle. They're typically placed at the bottom of the vehicle, just a few inches from the ground, making them hard to access for firefighters.

Fire departments in New Jersey have tried to take matters into their own hands, seeking out their own training for extinguishing EV fires, and even developing their own equipment for it. Firefighters in Paramus, New Jersey, created an invention that can slide underneath a vehicle to more effectively target the inflamed battery.

There is undoubtedly a gap in standards for handling EV fires, though there is work being done to address this need. New Jersey lawmakers have proposed bills that would require firefighters and first responders to be trained in handling EV fires, though the legislation did not make it past committee meetings.

Other regions have devised their own strategies for handling EV fires. New York has banned the sale and rental of e-bikes, scooters, and batteries that do not meet certain safety standards, and Maryland is developing a commission to study lithium-ion battery safety and determine safety standards. But some in the industry claim that more needs to be done.

"The federal government has really fallen far short of what they needed to have done before this became an issue," added Corbett. "We're relying on the private sector to keep things safe. The government has an obligation to be proactive and shut down the import of these cheap batteries."

Researchers Develop Self-Extinguishing Electric Vehicle Battery to Combat Runaway Fires

Scientists from Clemson University have potentially developed a solution to one of the largest obstacles facing electric vehicle adoption: battery fires.

Apparao Rao of Clemson University and Bingan Lu of Hunan University released research demonstrating the success of a self-extinguishing EV battery they've developed, reports the Cool Down. Through a myriad of tests, including operating at extreme temps and even having a stainless steel nail driven through it, the battery survived without catching on fire.

This was achieved through a seemingly simple innovation: the researchers took the most commonly used electrolyte in EV batteries, which is made up of lithium salt and an organic solvent, and replaced it with chemicals from a commercial fire extinguisher.

"We wanted to develop an electrolyte that was nonflammable, would readily transfer heat away from the battery pack, could function over a wide temperature range, was very durable, and would be compatible with any battery chemistry," the researchers explained in a press release.

A battery with these chemicals is able to operate for over a year without losing too much capacity, according to the research team. Some work did need to be done in a lab to make the chemicals compatible with batteries, taking into consideration toxicity levels and pollution.

Auto Parts Suppliers Worry Over Pace of Electric Vehicle Transition

The growing adoption of electric vehicle is something that has auto suppliers feeling anxious, reports Roll Call.

Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA) CEO Mike Spagnola recently stated that while the organization is not opposed to EV adoption, the 7,000 predominantly small suppliers it represents can't keep up.

According to SEMA, about a third of its products are ICE dependent. With internal combustion engine vehicles having hundreds more parts than EVs, parts suppliers are preparing for a slump in sales, with last year seeing a $52 billion decline.

Spagnola criticized the recently finalized EPA regulations on vehicle emissions, citing other modes of clean transportation besides only EVs, such as hybrid and hydrogen vehicles. He has been joined in this sentiment by the Motor & Equipment Manufacturers Association (MEMA), who has voiced support for the EPA regulations but noted that other technologies should be promoted alongside EVs.

A Deloitte study from last year underscored the difficulty for parts manufacturers to keep up with the EV transition, with little being done to help them adapt to the path auto manufacturers are going.

Some action has been taken to help the parts industry, with the U.S. Department of Energy having recently granted $100 million to small and medium-sized companies to help them through the change. A report released last year by L.E.K. Consulting also highlighted opportunities for suppliers in the EV sector, such as repairing batteries and developing brakes and tires for heavier vehicles.

"The ones that don't prepare for the transition will have the hardest time," said Alan Taub, a former auto executive and current director of the University of Michigan's Electric Vehicle Center.

Increasing Average Vehicle Age Brings Business for Aftermarket Repair and Parts

More and more Americans are opting to preserve their vehicles for as long as possible rather than purchasing a new one, creating an expanding customer base for the aftermarket, reports WTVA 9 News.

The driving force behind this is the continued rise of the average car payment, which has hit an all-time high this year. Monthly car payments for new vehicles amount to $700 for many drivers, with used cars being closer to $500 a month. Average interest rates for a loan on a new car sit at around 6.3%, and APRs for used cars are currently 11.9%.

It's a trend that's bringing more customers to seek out repairs, especially outside a dealership in an effort to save money. Chris Ruth, owner of Ruth's Auto Repair, frequently makes trips down the street from his shop to visit KARS in search of affordable parts for his customers.

Ruth has seen an increase in the price of new parts as opposed to used ones, and with him seeing an influx of customers holding onto their vehicles to save money, he does what he can to help them.

Automotive Aftermarket Saw 8.6% Increase in Sales Last Year, Despite Economic Pressure on Consumers

The Auto Care Association (ACA), in collaboration with MEMA Aftermarket Suppliers, has released its 2024 Joint Forecast Model, prepared by S&P Global.

The report highlighted 2023 as a strong year for the aftermarket, with total sales rising by 8.6% to $391 billion, in spite of continued inflation. General auto repair sectors, as well as dealership service centers and auto parts stores, outpaced initial predictions for growth.

Rising inflation has allowed businesses to charge more for their services to keep pace, though this is expected to gradually decline and meet the Fed's goals by late 2025. In spite of inflation, rising wages and a strong labor market have kept consumers spending, though they remain pessimistic about their finances.

Looking to this year, raised inflation will continue to prevent potential federal rate cuts being implemented, and consumers will remain pessimistic. The labor market is still performing strongly and wages are still on the rise, though, meaning customers will be more willing to spend.

The report predicts a 5.9% increase in sales for the aftermarket in 2024. From 2025-2027, an average growth rate of 4.5% is expected as the effects of inflation die down.

"The data reveals promising growth prospects for our industry, showcasing resilience in the face of challenges," said ACA President and CEO Bill Hanvey. "As we navigate the evolving market dynamics, industry stakeholders can expect a wealth of opportunities to emerge, driven by consumer demand, the aging vehicle population and technological advancements."

Over 211K Chryslers Recalled for Potential Disabling of Electronic Stability Control

Chrysler is recalling over 211,000 vehicles over a software malfunction that can potentially impact the electronic stability control system, reports Reuters.

The recall applies to certain 2022 Dodge Durango and Ram 2500 and 3500 vehicles.

According to a statement from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) this past Saturday, the software issue can lead to the Anti-Lock Brake System (ABS) control module disabling the electronic stability control system, presenting the risk of a crash.

Stellantis is instructing dealers to update the control module software in all recalled vehicles as a remedy.

FTC Warns Skimmers Are Stealing Food Stamp Benefits

The Federal Trade Commission on Thursday warned consumers on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to protect their benefits from skimmers.

Under the SNAP program, formerly the food stamp program, consumers use electronic benefit transfer debit cards to purchase food at SNAP-authorized stores, including many convenience stores.

The FTC said scammers are placing illegal card skimmers on payment terminals to steal data from the card's magnetic stripe. The EBT cards require PINs, so the thieves try to get those codes by phishing, texts or calls, or through tiny hidden cameras that record the PIN at the time of purchase.

The stolen data is used to create counterfeit cards and drain the SNAP recipient's benefits. "They can even find out how much is stored in your account by calling the state's benefit hotline," the alert said.

EBT card skimming could affect business for the thousands of convenience stores that participate in the SNAP program, the USDA has told OPIS. About 45% of the nearly 250,000 authorized SNAP retailers are convenience stores, according to federal data. While roughly 6% of SNAP benefits are redeemed at c-stores, SNAP recipients are still a significant customer segment for the convenience channel.

--Reporting by Donna Harris

Your Inspection License May be Worth Money

Depending on where you are located, it may be possible to sell your license. Before merely turning it in, contact the association for further information.

DMV Record Retrieval

DMV record retrieval is available to association members and affiliates at a cost of $12 per record. Additionally, you may order DMV certified paper abstracts of driver's license, vehicle registration, and vehicle title records for an additional fee of $2 per abstract. Please call (518) 452-4367

Bennett: The Right Interview Questions: Your Secret Weapon for Successful Hiring

Every individual's impact is magnified in a small business. A great hire is like a shot of adrenaline, bringing new energy, driving production and progress—and significantly boosting morale. They seamlessly integrate into the team, enhance the company culture and can help to turn satisfied customers into loyal advocates. On the other hand, a bad hire acts as an anchor, pulling down team dynamics, stalling progress and even impacting the foundation of customer trust. They can create a ripple effect of negativity, causing strain within the team and potentially damaging long-cultivated client relationships. Indeed, the contrast between a great hire and a poor one in a small business environment is nothing short of night and day. I have certainly had my share of hiring misfires. You find the "ideal candidate." They have all the skills, training and expertise you want, but it doesn't work. It may be as simple as potential unrealized and expectations not met, or it can be disruptive to damaging to the business and team. If you have been in business for any period, you've likely experienced some similar version of the "bad hire" syndrome. This occurs when we focus too much on skills and experience and “need” more than on personality, character traits and cultural alignment.

From my experiences, I've gleaned a crucial insight: moving from a traditional, skill-focused hiring process to one that prioritizes character and individual traits can revolutionize your business. It's clear to me now that it's not just the technical abilities but a person's inherent characteristics that determine their potential and influence in a business. These characteristics drive their contributions and profoundly impact a company's culture, growth trajectory, and overall success.

The primary focus in recruiting and evaluation should be to find people whose natural tendencies, motivations and personalities fit your company culture. Skills can be trained and developed. Knowledge and experience are akin to a muscle and can be grown and developed with effort and work. In contrast, changing someone's character and traits is extremely difficult. You're far better off targeting and hiring eager, fast learners who want to grow, even if they still need to check every box of required qualifications. The benefits of prioritizing attitude over aptitude are immense. Employees who thrive in their roles and align with company values will be more engaged, loyal, and productive over the long term. They'll support your customers better and spread positivity to their coworkers. Meanwhile, one toxic employee, even a highly skilled one with the wrong attitude, can destroy morale and damage your reputation.

The Wrong Hire Can Wreak Havoc

Through the rollercoaster of my hiring missteps, I have honed and perfected my candidate interview process. After witnessing firsthand, the havoc a wrong hire can wreak, I realized that the ideal addition to my team was about more than just the skill set or work experience. It's the character, the grit, the spirit of an individual that makes the real difference. I knew I needed to overhaul my recruiting and evaluation process by putting character traits before skill sets. And let me tell you, this perspective shift has been a game-changer. My team and I have identified the qualities that define an A-player in our culture. Our focus now is on attracting and recruiting the best fit for our team. Our ideal candidate must have self-drive, resiliency, adaptability, humility, integrity, practical intelligence, and a team player spirit. For us, it's about finding those hungry for growth, brimming with curiosity, and radiating emotional strength. And how do you uncover these traits, you may ask? It all comes down to asking the right questions.

Traits You Should Look For When Interviewing Each Candidate

- Drive
- Resiliency
- Adaptability
- Humility
- Integrity
- Practical Intelligence
- Team-ability
- Curiosity
- Emotional Strength

Here Are Some Interview Questions for Each Trait That I've Found Incredibly Insightful:

1. Can you describe a time when you went above and beyond to achieve a goal or complete a task? What motivated you, and what was the outcome?
2. Tell me about a long-term goal you set for yourself. How did you go about achieving it?
3. Can you describe a time when you took on a task or project beyond your job description? What motivated you to do it?

What to Listen For

Look for clear examples of the candidate showing initiative, determination and a willingness to put in extra effort to achieve their goals. Their motivation might come from a desire for personal growth, passion for the work, or commitment to the team or company. They should demonstrate a pattern of proactively taking on challenges and persistently pushing toward their objectives, despite obstacles or setbacks. (Their enthusiasm while sharing these experiences can also provide valuable insight into their drive.)

SUPPORT THE REPAIR ACT AND SAVE MONEY

The amount of data collected by modern vehicle on-board systems is staggering. But who owns that data; the vehicle owner or the manufacturer? When it comes to vehicle repair the fight to secure data access for vehicle owners and their chosen independent repair facilities continues. Neal Dunn (R-FL-02), Brendan Boyle (D-PA-02), Warren Davidson (R-OH-08), and Marie Gluesenkamp Perez (D-WA-03) introduced the "Right to Equitable and Professional Auto Industry Repair (REPAIR) Act" in the House of Representatives this year. The bill is aimed at giving small independent repair shops the same kind of data access that licensed vehicle dealerships already receive.

"Americans should not be forced to bring their cars to more costly and inconvenient dealerships for repairs when independent auto repair shops are often cheaper and far more accessible," said Rep. Rush. "But as cars become more advanced, manufacturers are getting sole access to important vehicle data while independent repair shops are increasingly locked out. The status quo for auto repair is not tenable, and it is getting worse. If the monopoly on vehicle repair data continues, it would affect nearly 860,000 blue-collar workers and 274,000 service facilities."

"The lack of meaningful consumer choice in the repair market harms low-income Americans and those in underserved communities most," Rush continued. "A single mother who relies on her vehicle to go to work and get her kids to school can't afford to wait days or weeks to have her car repaired at a dealership that is hours away and more expensive than the auto shop around the corner. The REPAIR Act is common sense, necessary legislation that will end manufacturers' monopoly on vehicle repair and maintenance and allow Americans the freedom to choose where to repair their vehicles."

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has determined that the monopoly that auto manufacturers and their dealers have leads to increased costs to the motoring public. The United States General Accounting Office (GAO) agrees with this opinion.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

So, what can you do as a vehicle owner to help the "Right to Repair" movement? Demand that the lawmakers that represent you also represent the need for fair and equitable access to all parts of the vehicle care equation. The Auto Care Association makes it easy to contact your Senator and Congressperson via their website:

https://www.repairact.com

Let them know your concerns. The form will ask for your address and automatically identify your representatives, while also drafting a letter to them. It's just that easy.

Please support the Repair Act by using this webpage to send a letter to your federal lawmakers. It will take only 30 seconds.