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Petrol stations to install fume capture systems

The harmful petrol vapour which escapes during the refuelling of cars at service stations will have to be captured according to a deal reached with the Council, which has been confirmed today by the European Parliament. Petrol vapour contains benzene, which is known to cause cancer, and contributes to the formation of ground-level ozone ('smog'), one of the air pollutants most damaging to human health and the environment.

The European Parliament today confirmed a first-reading agreement reached in informal negotiations with Council which demands that stage II petrol vapour recovery technologies will become compulsory at new or renovated service stations with large throughput as of 1 January 2012. Almost all service stations (small ones will be exempted) will be obliged to install these new technologies by 2018, 2 years earlier than proposed by the Commission. An exception exists also for service stations used exclusively in association with the construction and delivery of new motor vehicles.

The Member States will draw drivers' attention to the recovery systems by appropriate labelling of petrol pumps. They also have to lay down rules on effective, proportionate and dissuasive penalties. According to Commission data, the EU numbers about 110,000 service stations that employ some 440,000 workers and have an annual turnover of some 250 billion euros. The Commission will review the implementation of the directive by end 2014.

Background

Petrol contains volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that evaporate inside the fuel tank, filling the empty space in the tank above the fuel. As a vehicle is refuelled, these vapours are pushed out of the tank by the incoming fuel and, unless captured, escape into the atmosphere out of the top of the vehicle filler pipe. New technologies allow capturing this escaping vapour. This is done by creating a vacuum to suck back the vapour through the dispensing hose and nozzle, either to the station's underground storage tank or directly back to the fuel pump. Petrol vapour recovery technologies are currently being introduced by several European countries.

An existing directive (1994/63) is already regulating the control of VOCs emissions from the storage of petrol and its distribution from terminals to service stations.

The report was adopted with 598 votes in favour, 13 against and 15 abstentions.

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