

F I T S

L I K E

A G L O V E

By Pat Pape

A clean fueling and foodservice
environment in your stores enhances
the customer experience.



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veryone from dentists and doctors to convenience store employees wear disposable gloves on the job. With laws about food handling, worries about flu outbreaks and fears about pandemics, the demand for disposable gloves is growing.

According to Allied Market Research of Portland, Oregon, the world's disposable glove industry is expected to see a compound annual growth rate of 6.2% from now until 2020 and be a \$7.9 billion business by the end of this decade. Much that growth will be in foodservice as workers strive to meet strict food-handling regulations.

"Those regulations are in place to prevent foodservice workers from handling food with their bare hands," said Jeff

Van Kalker, product manager in the food safety area of Ecolab. "One of the most common ways to comply with that regulation is through the use of disposable gloves."

Disposable gloves protect the worker's hands, but the real goal is to prevent cross-contamination. "Think about some of the most dangerous foods out there, such as raw chicken," he said. "If someone is cutting chicken, he would need to change his gloves and wash his hands and put on new gloves before going on to something else. If he's going to make a sandwich, he better have on a new set of gloves."

That same strict attention to cleanliness and good health is important in other areas of the c-store environment, including inside the restrooms, at the fountain and even outside the store. One new program is being rolled out to provide customers with an improved experience specifically at the fuel pumps.

THE IDEA

Six years ago, entrepreneur Antonio Lyon of Weston, Florida, was motoring through Europe with his wife when he first saw the clear plastic gloves that protected customers' hands from the less-than-pristine fuel pump handle. "My wife said, 'We're so health-conscious in the U.S., but we don't have anything like this at our gas pumps,'" Lyon recalled. "The idea stuck in my head."

Back home, Lyon discovered research from Kimberly-Clark that found that gas pump handles are one of the most contaminated surfaces people touch every day. In fact, pump handles carry more germs than other public surfaces, including escalator handrails, mailbox handles, ATM buttons and parking meters. The research pinpointed a need for a solution similar to what he'd seen in Europe.

In November 2014, Lyon's creation, dubbed U-Glove, made its debut in 100 southern Florida convenience stores with fuel, and expanded into northern Florida stores by year's end. The roomy, see-through gloves are placed in a sleek dispenser that can be attached to any gas pump with a peel-and-stick adhesive and made available to gasoline customers at no charge.

WHAT A GIRL WANTS

Before introducing the program, Lyon tested the gloves in several Florida gas stations and enlisted Balvor LLC, a Chicago-based sales and marketing firm, to research consumer attitudes and behaviors related to fueling vehicles.



Whether they use gloves or not, having them available shows consumers that you're concerned about their safety."

Balvor's investigation revealed that while both sexes liked the option of using a plastic glove, the solution resonates more strongly with women (57%) as compared to men (45%), indicating they'd use the U-Glove "always" or "often" when filling up.

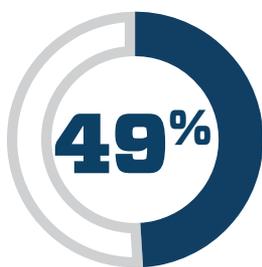
Plus, the program could help build positive word-of-mouth marketing for retailers who offer it since the majority of both sexes — women (76%) and men (58%) — said they'd tell friends and co-workers about the free gloves if they were available.

According to the study, over three-quarters of fuel customers think washing their hands in the store's restroom is inconvenient, and nearly two-thirds say hand sanitizers don't eliminate dirt or fuel odors completely.

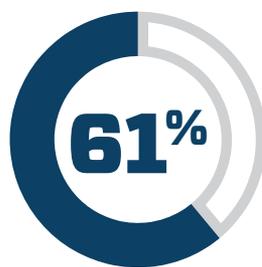
"Females are more likely to place a high level of importance on issues at the pump," said David Bishop, managing partner with Balvor. "In fact, 71% of females versus 59% of males indicate that it's 'extremely' or 'very important' not to have their hands feel dirty, grimy, or greasy. Hand sanitizer may help reduce transmission of germs, but it is not intended to remove the visible effects from pumping, such as odor or dirt."

Sandy Reus, vice president at Sunshine Gasoline Distributors of Miami, Florida, participated in the initial U-Glove test at several Sunshine locations and now offers them at 60 stations. "A lot of people are very conscious about the spread of

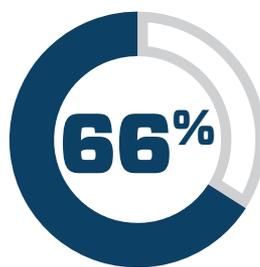
Consumers rank the importance after fueling that their hands...



Don't still have germs or bacteria from handling the pump



Don't smell like fuel



Don't feel dirty, grimy or greasy

(Source: Consumer Survey, Balvor LLC, July 2014)



1. U-Glove - The gloves protect customers' hands from the less-than-pristine fuel pump handle.

2. U-Glove Dispenser - Gloves are placed in a sleek dispenser that can be attached to any gas pump with a peel-and-stick adhesive and made available to customers at no charge.

viruses, and I think U-Glove will appeal to moms with young kids," she said.

"We, as an industry are often discussing ways to attract women to convenience stores," said Bishop. "The U-Glove solution is one of those things that may help retailers provide a more female-friendly environment."

EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS

Rahim Budhwani owns nine gas stations in Birmingham, Alabama, each offering customers complimentary hand sanitizer at the pumps. Committed to maintaining a clean, healthy store environment, he believes that a glove-filled dispenser at each of his pumps will be a bonus he can provide to customers.

"If it's available, people will use it. Even if just one out of 10 people appreciate it, my job is done," said Budhwani, also a NACS Board of Directors member, who plans to have the gloves at his locations.

"Whether they use gloves or not, having them available shows consumers that you're concerned about their hand safety," said Michael Davis, vice president of NACS member services and a veteran c-store owner. "There are a lot of reasons this could be popular."

Dr. Kantilal Bhalani is a founder of the Asian American Retailers Association, a convenience store owner and a practicing physician for 32 years. "The U-Glove shows that

operators care about customers," he said, adding that it might also be useful inside a store. "You might want to wear one to eat a donut or sandwich. There is nothing wrong with that idea."

Lyon is confident that offering free gloves will help drive foodservice purchases, because clean hands are necessary for grabbing a c-store food item and eating on the run. "About 80% of all gas stations offer products that customers have to eat with their bare hands," he said. "If you finish filling your tank and you feel like your hands aren't clean, that creates a barrier to walking into the store and buying food."

Don't expect to see U-Gloves at every fuel outlet, however. "This is something everyone could use," Lyon said. "But some stations may not have the level of commitment required to effectively execute as intended. We hope to team up with quality retailers who are already committed to a clean environment — retailers who have demonstrated interest and discipline when it comes to safety, hygiene and sanitation."

Employees can reinforce that image of cleanliness inside the store by using disposable gloves for general cleaning and sanitizing restrooms. "Not only do you want to protect your hand from germs, you want to protect it from chemicals," said Van Kalker of Ecolab.

PLEASANT EXPERIENCE

You want customers to know from the minute they walk in your store that food safety and a healthy environment are part of your brand. Having foodservice workers wearing disposable gloves while they work is one way to visually send that message. Offering customers a chance to keep their hands clean while pumping gas is another.

"[The U-Glove] program is a visible expression of the retailer's effort to provide a more pleasant customer experience," Bishop added. "Research illustrates that if you do that, customers will reward you in a number of ways. While you still need competitive fuel prices and must be considered a convenient retail option, programs like this just may help you win more fuel trips down the road."

Van Kalker thinks offering gloves at the gas pump is a fine idea. "The beauty of a disposable glove is that it protects you, the user, from picking up germs from someone else," he said, adding that it wouldn't hurt to carry a few when you travel. "They say the TV remote control is the dirtiest thing in a hotel room." **NACS**

Pat Pape spent 20 years in the corporate communications and IT departments at 7-Eleven before becoming a writer/communications consultant for retailing clients and trade associations.