

## At New Jersey Gas Stations, Attendants Will Serve Your Fuel: It's the Law

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You can pump your own soft-serve ice cream at trendy yogurt shoppes. But you still can't pump your own gasoline in New Jersey. Why?

Once again, lawmakers in Trenton have [killed an effort](#) to save motorists money at the pump, allegedly in the name of safety.

Self-serve gasoline has been allowed across the country for 73 years, ever since the first pump-your-own gas station opened in California in 1947.

Prior to that, all gas stations were full-service. Not only did the “pump jockeys” fill your tank but they'd check your oil, water levels in your radiator and wash your windows — and maybe even give you a set of free steak knives for your 35-cent-a-gallon purchase. Remember those good ol' days?

When the self-serve idea came to New Jersey in the late 1940s, a local gas station owner named Irving Reingold in Hackensack started offering a discount for the do-it-yourselfers. Rather than charging the going rate of 21.9 cents a gallon, [his self-service stations charged only 18.9 cents](#).

His operation became wildly popular, prompting competitors to retaliate by shooting up his station and forcing Reingold to install bullet-proof glass. Competitors then persuaded the state legislature to ban the

practice of self-serve, and Reingold eventually went out of business.

So, in 1949 Trenton lawmakers passed the Retail Gasoline Dispensing Safety Act, which read:

“Because of the fire hazards directly associated with dispensing fuel, it is in the public interest that gasoline station operators have the control needed over that activity to ensure compliance with appropriate safety procedures, including turning off vehicle engines and refraining from smoking while fuel is dispensed.”

That law is still on the books in New Jersey, the only such state law in the nation. But [recent polls](#) show 73% of Garden-staters actually prefer being served by attendants. Some of them have never pumped their own gas in a lifetime of driving.

The fine for violating the law is \$500, though it’s seldom enforced. Try pumping your own gas in New Jersey, assuming you can activate the pump, and you’re more likely to get a scolding than a ticket — as I have found from personal experience. One study in 2015 showed that state had issued [zero infractions](#) in the previous two years for that heinous “crime.”

The town of Huntington on Long Island has [a similar ban](#) on self-serve, despite appeals from gas station owners to stay competitive.

Garden State residents have been trying for years to rescind their self-serve ban.

In 2015, State Assemblyman Dean O’Scanlon introduced a bill to allow self-serve, saying he was “offended by people that argue that New Jerseyians are mentally incapable of pumping their own gas without setting themselves on fire.”

Cynics say that New Jersey’s self-service ban is to protect thousands of pump-jockey jobs and higher profit margins for station owners.

Here in Connecticut, lawmakers seem to trust Nutmeggers with pumping their own fuel. The new technology at pumps helps prevent accidents and the cases of motorist self-immolation are exceedingly rare — so far.

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