RetailingToday™
SERVING THE TOP 100 U.S. RETAILERS & THEIR TRADING PARTNERS

Operation 'FuelCall' underway at AAFES installations

JANUARY 16, 2015 | BY **MIKE TROY**

The Army & Air Force Exchange Service is making it easier for disabled veterans to buy gas at 370 of its stores worldwide thanks to a full-service initiative called FuelCall.

AAFES worked with U.S. Rep. Tammy Duckworth of Illinois to secure $1.12 million in funding from the Department of Defense for the addition of FuelCall assistance systems at 370 Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps installations worldwide. FuelCall is essentially an oversize button on a clearly signed pole which allows drivers with disabilities to alert associates inside the store that they need assistance fueling their vehicle.

"All persons with disabilities, including thousands of returning veterans, active service members, as well as military families with physical disabilities, understand the difficulty of filling up their tanks at gas stations that are supposedly accessible," said Duckworth, an Iraq War veteran who lost the use of her legs and partial use of her right arm after her helicopter was hit by a rocket propelled grenade in 2004. "We must do better. The ability to drive independently is key to the American lifestyle. Ensuring that disabled Americans can consistently and safely refuel their vehicles is critical to their ability to live independent and fulfilling lives. I applaud AAFES and the Department of Defense for their leadership on this issue, and I hope it serves as an example for gas station owners throughout our country."

So far, 16 AAFES Express station have installed FuelCall and 38 additional locations are due to be added later this month. Plans call for the system to be added to 215 Express locations in the U.S. and overseas by May.

When an Express location equipped with the system has more than one associate on duty, motorists with a disability license plate or placard may have their gas pumped for them. Signs clearly identify what pump islands have the system and list the hours the service is available.

"Making gas stations accessible to drivers with disabilities is a priority," said Exchange Real Estate Vice President Michael Smietana. "This system allows wounded warriors and others with disabilities to easily get assistance at the pump without frustration."

AAFES is a unique entity that pursues a dual mission of providing authorized patrons with quality merchandise and services at competitively low prices and generating non-appropriated fund earnings as a supplemental source of funding for military morale, welfare and recreation programs. From an organizational standpoint, AAFES is what's known in Washington, D.C. jargon as a joint non-appropriated fund instrumentality of the Department of Defense that is directed by a Board of Directors which is responsible to the Secretaries of the Army and the Air Force through the Service Chiefs of Staff.