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Dear Ms. Kamen:

I am submitting this filing regarding the lack of Disaster and Emergency Planning for the Costco Gas Station Special Exception application (S-2863). I am submitting this as an individual, but I am an active member of the Committee to Save Kensington which supports the Stop Costco Gas Coalition (of which I am also a member). I feel more time should have been given to the public to respond to the new materials which Costco has produced; however, like others I am summarizing key points to be considered.

You have already received filings with details about the differences between this planned gas station and regular gas stations; the traffic, health, ground water, forest conservation, and air quality impacts; effects on a close-by school for severely disabled students, recreational activities, etc. I support these but will not repeat the excellent information they contain.

As a resident of historic Capitol View Park (about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile away), I want you to know the concerns about the problems the proposed mega-station brings are recognized as not just affecting the Kensington Heights area, but all the entire surrounding communities. Any major accident, spillage, etc., will affect air and water quality for all of us; if a major disaster happens then lives could be impacted.

At present, Costco has not filed a Disaster/Emergency Plan. This is inconceivable to me since the proposed station is at least four times larger than other stations in the area—or stations in most of Montgomery County. I spoke with Mr. Erich Brann, a representative of Costco, about these issues at their Open House, held in Wheaton on April 25, 2012. During our conversation he said there was a two hour back up battery which operated all the safety shutdown and monitoring equipment. There were no contingency plans for the very unusual—earthquakes, lightning strikes, plane crashes, explosions, shootings, etc.,--or even the usual ones, such as fires and tanker truck accidents/spills. He indicated that the unlikely was not going to happen and two hours was plenty of time to get emergency personnel to the station.

### **The Unlikely is all too often the Unplanned for Disaster and/or Emergency!**

One of my earliest jobs was working on engineering Safety Analysis Reports for nuclear power plants being built in the USA (and similar ones around the world, such as Fukiyama). In these reports there were statements such as no earthquake (or tidal surge or flood) had happened at a specific location in 50-100 years—the assumption being these trends would continue. Yet in the past 30+ years most of these assumptions were proven wrong. For example, there have been substantial earthquakes near many nuclear power plants--including locally the past two summers (the one in Virginia actually damaged and shut down the nuclear power plant). In another case, a specific power plant in New York was the original 9/11 target—this plant was not built to withstand planes larger than those built in the 1970s (i.e., 737s and larger).

While a Costco mega-station is not a nuclear power plant, assuming everything will work correctly is absurd. There are in many respects more immediate dangers with gas stations since they are in areas accessible to the general public, with no or few protections against stupidity or Mother Nature. For example, most gas station fires are started by customers, involving gasoline.

There is no recognition in Costco's assertions of safety that the area surrounding the Westfield Mall area suffers total gridlock when there are emergencies—there would be no response in less than two hours (the expected back up battery life), including no replacement personnel except possibly from the store. One recent example is the so-called Snowmagedden—in which the whole DC area stopped. In Kensington, the Pepco Sub Station was hit by lightning—knocking power out in the surrounding area, including Westfield Mall. Fire engines were stuck behind cars which couldn't move—I watched as firefighters helped stranded motorists move their cars at Knowles and Beach Drive in order to get their equipment back to the Kensington Station. If there had been a fire it would have been more than 30 minutes before they could have responded to it.

Some may regard the lack of a Disaster Management Plan as a rather minor issue. We are perhaps being picky. But we are all informed, with appalling frequency, of fires and shootings in movie theaters across our country; many are in Malls, as is the case with Westfield's Wheaton Mall, where the movie complex is quite near the proposed mega gas station site. And of the efforts that first responders must make in such situations. Even if our traffic impact analysis is totally inaccurate, even if the opening of the Costco store and the proposed Costco mega gas station proves to have zero impact on traffic in the Mall, shouldn't our County expect that a Disaster Management Plan (DMP) be filed in conjunction with S-2863? And shouldn't concerned citizens expect that our first responders have been able to look at the DMP before concluding that the gas station will create no additional burdens on their resources?

Costco has not satisfied General Conditions 59-G-1.21 (a) (9) because it has failed to prove that adequate public facilities (specifically police and fire protection) can be guaranteed. By failing to submit a Disaster Management Plan it has failed to provide first responders with any data upon which to base their assessment of the scope of additional levels of protection they may be required to provide.

The APF documents require that Costco provide assurance that police and fire facilities are adequate to deal with any additional demands on first responder capacities. As best I/we can determine—from our readings of the filings and from discussions with the Planning Commission staff—there are no records of involvement of police or fire officials in the discussions of the merits of the Costco application.

There is no record of any Disaster Plan.

Nor is there any Plan describing how smaller incidents, such as shootings, would impact the safety of the gas station.

I have listed several Maryland examples of fires and other emergencies at gas stations in Appendices to this letter—including a vapor release in Kensington, MD.

Please let me know you received this email. If you have any questions feel free to call me at 240-460-6061. Thank you.

Best regards,

Patricia M. Mulready, M.S., M.Phil.  
10233 Capitol View Avenue  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

## APPENDIX A: EXAMPLES OF EMERGENCIES AT/NEAR MARYLAND GAS STATIONS

Main article: [Methyl tert-butyl ether controversy#Jacksonville, Maryland](#)

Phoenix was the location of a January 2006 [Exxon](#) gas leak, where over 26,000 gallons of gas slowly seeped out of a punctured pipe at a station at the intersection of [Maryland Route 145](#) and [Maryland Route 146](#). The area affected by the gas leak was about a half-mile downhill from the location of the gas station. Six wells were contaminated, and 62 residential wells showed traces of [MTBE](#). The state filed a \$12 million suit against Exxon in April 2006. In September 2008, the state settled case with Exxon, imposing a \$4 million civil penalty. In addition, about 300 Jacksonville residents sought compensatory and punitive damages from Exxon worth several billion dollars. In March 2009, a Baltimore County jury found Exxon liable and awarded various amounts of compensatory damages to the plaintiffs.

Some residents still seek a settlement with Exxon. 1.5 billion settlement in the second lawsuit. third lawsuit underway Read more on the exxon spill in the article [Jacksonville, MD Exxon Mobile Gas Leak Case](#).

For more details, or if the embedded links don't work, please go here:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoenix,\\_Maryland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoenix,_Maryland)

### **Vapor cloud in Kensington dissipates**

*By Washington Post editors*

Trains traveling through Kensington have returned to normal speeds after Montgomery County firefighters determined that vapors from a nearby gasoline spill Wednesday afternoon were dissipating quickly enough to pose no danger of igniting, a fire-rescue spokesman said. Capt. Oscar Garcia, a spokesman for Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service, said transit agencies were asked to slow down trains using CSX tracks near Connecticut and Summit avenues around 3:30 p.m. because of concerns that a spark from the metal wheels on metal tracks at high speeds could ignite vapors from the gasoline spill at a nearby Getty station. By 4 p.m., fire officials determined that the vapors were dissipating, and trains were returned to normal speeds, he said.

No one was injured, and no one was evacuated beyond the Getty station, Garcia said. A gas station contractor will clean up the gasoline spill, estimated at 25 to 30 gallons, he said. The gas spilled when a tanker truck was dropping off its load.

<http://voices.washingtonpost.com/local-breaking-news/maryland/vapor-cloud-in-kensington-diss.html>

### **Riverdale, MD**

Shell gas station on fire, 2009

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0GgACQZiA4>

### **Falls Church, VA**

2-alarm Shell gas station fire, 2009

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xx1a8345idI&feature=endscreen&NR=1>

**Seat Pleasant, MD**

BP service station burning overnight, 2010

<http://statter911.com/2010/03/07/raw-video-from-service-station-fire-in-prince-georges-county/>

**Kentland, MD**

Shell gas station fire, 2011

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9QOwn0eYZE>

**Gaithersburg, MD**

"panic at costco, gaithersburg, md gas leak, alarm when off... 2011"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6DNGLxXP4tM>

**Bailey's Crossroads, VA**

A Picture is Worth 1,000 Words: Gas Station Fire Edition, 2012

[http://dcist.com/2012/06/a\\_picture\\_is\\_worth\\_1000\\_words\\_gas\\_s.php](http://dcist.com/2012/06/a_picture_is_worth_1000_words_gas_s.php)

## APPENDIX B: FIRES AT USA GAS STATIONS

### FIRES AT U.S. SERVICE STATIONS

**Report:** NFPA's "Fires at U.S. Service Stations"

**Author:** Ben Evarts

**Issued:** April 2011

*Incident types and trend data are reported for fires that occurred in or at service stations. Three different types of incidents, structure fires, vehicle fires, and outside and other fires are analyzed for cause, equipment involved, and other type of material first ignited, among other relevant factors specific to each incident type. Other information relevant to this occupancy, such as the hazards of static electricity is presented as well.*

#### Executive Summary

During the five-year period of 2004-2008, NFPA estimates that U.S. fire departments responded to an average of 5,020 in service or gas station properties per year. These fires caused an annual average of two civilian deaths, 48 civilian fire injuries, and \$20 million in direct property damage. The majority of the fires in this category were vehicle fires. Reported fires in this occupancy group fell 46% from 7,860 in 1980 to 4,280 in 2008.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were 117,000 gasoline stations in the United States in 2007<sup>1</sup>. Fires in these occupancies represent a variety of incidents, including structure fires, vehicle fires, outdoor fires and other fires. The majority of incidents are vehicle fires (61%), but the majority of the property damage (59%), results from structure fires. Outside trash or rubbish fires account for 12% of the fires reported to local fire departments at this type of property.

Twelve percent of fires reported to local fire departments in these properties were structure fires. The most common items first ignited in structure fires at service stations were flammable and combustible liquids and gases, piping or filter (22% of structure fires), followed by rubbish, trash, or waste (18%) and electrical wire or cable insulation (13%).

Most vehicle fires (82%) occurred in passenger vehicles, these fires accounted for nearly half of the total number of civilian injuries that occurred in service station fires of any kind (structure, vehicle, outside, other). The most common type of material first ignited in a vehicle fire was gasoline (28%).

Outside and other fires accounted for 15% of incidents at service stations. Natural vegetation fires accounted for 42% of these incidents. The most common heat source for outside fires was smoking materials (21%).

Twelve percent of fire incidents at service stations were outside trash or rubbish fires.

Individuals interested in keeping service stations safe from fire should consult [NFPA 30A – Code for Motor Fuel Dispensing Facilities and Repair Garages](#) for information about fire prevention in these properties.

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2010, Table 740 "Economic Census Summary" (NAICS 2002 Basis): 2002 and 2007

#### FULL REPORT\*

2011 "[Fires at U.S. Service Stations](#)" report (PDF, 222 KB)

#### FACT SHEET

"[Fires at U.S. Service Stations](#)" fact sheet (PDF, 34 KB)

#### RELATED REPORT

##### NFPA members:

2010 "[Selected Published Incidents Involving Automobile Repair Shops](#)" report (PDF, 57 KB)

\* NFPA members can download free PDF copies of One-Stop Data Shop reports. All reports are also available for sale. To order, e-mail [Paula Levesque](mailto:Paula.Levesque@nfpa.org) or

call [+1 617 984-7443](tel:+16179847443). Not an NFPA member? [Join today](#).