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Tank robbery

GAS THEFT | Fuel-siphoning may be surging, so sales of locking caps are soaring

July 21, 2008 BY [KARA SPAK](#) Staff
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Les Kniskern parked his truck in his Lincoln Square alley space July 11 with the gas tank nearly full.

When he tried to start it the next day, he found the 20-gallon tank totally drained.

"Somebody just popped [the gas cap] open, stuck a hose in and siphoned it off," Kniskern said, estimating he lost as much as \$70 worth of gas. "I'm presuming they just filled their own tank and drove off."

Gas siphoning, that scourge of the 1970s, may be making a comeback.

Chicago Police don't keep statistics on gas theft. Officers said they haven't seen an uptick in reports of siphoning or tank puncturing, though it may be people aren't reporting such a small theft.

Still, gas theft -- or at least the fear of it -- is causing a surge in the sale of locking gas caps.

The caps, which cost between \$10 and \$30, are designed to keep gas in the tank and siphon hoses out.

Stant Manufacturing, believed to be the largest U.S. producer of gas caps, said it currently is filling four times the normal order rate for the locking caps.

"Every time we think we get caught up, we get a big batch of orders in," said Chris Hoffman, Stant spokesman. "Ever since we hit the \$3.50 [per gallon] mark, the demand on locking gas caps is very high."

At auto parts retailer AutoZone, locking gas cap sales are up 50 percent over the last three months, said Ray Pohlman, AutoZone spokesman. Advance Auto Parts is also seeing brisker-than-normal sales, a spokeswoman said.

"More and more people are protecting their investment," Pohlman said, noting that sales spiked when gas hit the \$2, \$3 and \$4 per gallon milestones.

The caps aren't foolproof, but Hoffman said they can provide some low-cost peace of mind.

Kniskern serves as chief of staff to state Rep. John Fritchey (D-Chicago), who is proposing a bill to increase the penalty for gas theft.

Fritchey wants gas siphoning to be treated as a Class 4 felony, punishable by up to three years in prison. Currently, gas theft is treated as a misdemeanor, punishable by a fine or up to a year in the county jail.

Contributing: *Vivian Huang*

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