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Gasoline Prices Drive Up Credit-Card Use

Reuters News Service

U.S. drivers are relying more on credit cards to cushion the pain of high gasoline prices, according to the National Association of Convenience Stores.

Convenience stores, which sell about three-quarters of all gasoline sold in the nation, have seen credit-card purchases for motor fuel rise to 70% from about 54% last year, the industry group said.

And drivers are seen reaching into their pockets for plastic more often as they try to stretch their budgets.

"Consumers are trying to displace the pain for a few weeks," said Jeff Lenard,

a spokesman for the group, which includes stores owned by oil companies.

U.S. gasoline prices continue to reach new heights as crude-oil prices climb on strong demand and U.S. refineries are running flat out to make enough gasoline to keep gas tanks topped off.

According to travel club AAA, the national average price for a gallon of unleaded gasoline hit a record of \$2.614 a gallon Monday, up from \$1.881 a year ago.

Another impact of high gas prices: In 1998, one in every three gallons sold was high octane. In 2003, this was down to one in five, the convenience-store group said.