

Petrol PLAZA

Exclusive: Shell discusses COVID-19 social response

PetrolPlaza spoke to Sydney Kimball, Retail Vicepresident for Shell Americas, about the numerous initiatives the company has carried out in America to help communities deal with the pandemic.



Sydney Kimball

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a new challenge to governments and societies. The United States, the country most affected with almost 2 million confirmed cases and over 100,000 deaths, was forced to go into lockdown and entered a recession for the first time since the 2009. Private companies in the country have tried to survive the current crisis while also offering assistance to society.

Shell, the leading gas station brand in the U.S. with more than 14,000 branded sites and a 12.4% market share, has carried out a series of initiatives to respond to the pandemic with food and mental health at the helm.

“We chose Feeding America and Mental Health America as those are the two things that really needed our help in this time. We wanted people to at least have food on the table and to better endure this really hard time from a mental health perspective, including our own teams,” explains Sydney Kimball, Retail Vicepresident for Shell Americas.

In support of Feeding America, Shell is providing 2.5 million meals to impacted communities across the U.S., free fuel to food services such as Meals on Wheels and partnered with various other organizations. They also partnered with Coca-Cola for a national offer of water or an energy drink to front line medical workers and first responders.



With strict lockdown measures being implemented across America, mental health became another key focus for Shell. They teamed up with Mental Health America, Family & Youth Counseling Agency Inc. and others to provide a variety of resources to those communities experiencing mental health stress related to COVID-19.

Kimball and her team encouraged Shell retailers across America to care for their communities and implement safety measures.

“We put together a communications package within the first few days that we made available to all our retailers across Americas detailing how we are keeping customers safe, suggesting putting hand sanitizers at the pay point while providing posters to help reinforce those messages. Most of our sites in the U.S. are self-serve and many retailers decided this was the opportunity to actually offer a full service. Because volumes are lower, it enabled staff to do more.”

In a particular case, a dealer with 50 sites in the New York area, a region heavily hit by the pandemic, immediately decided he wanted to offer gloves to customers. With Shell’s support, he has now given out 1.2 million pairs.



Other measures include the production of 400,000 reusable facemasks with the slogan 'GO WELL', given away to employees and customers, and repurposing their chemicals plants to produce bottles of hand sanitizer.

When asked about what are some of the changes that the pandemic has had on gas stations, Kimball says people have now realized how many products they can actually find inside a store, with many realizing the availability and closeness of them.

"I see customers wanting less touch points. We stopped requiring a signature on receipts at Shell sites. Regarding our mobile payment app, you used to have to enter the code into the pump, and we've taken that step away," she adds.

The current context has also given way to new initiatives. A month ago, Shell launched Uber Eats in Canada - 330 sites now allow customers to order products from the safety of their homes.

With America opening up, Shell expects volumes to continue to improve over the coming weeks.