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Don't get too revved up: Rumored area gas 'war' really more a skirmish

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Nothing piques the interest of daily drivers like a good, roaring gasoline price war.

Unfortunately, speculation in the news media Friday of a Twin Cities gas war apparently was a bit premature. Some prices have been verified here and there as low as 93.9 cents a gallon for regular unleaded, but "war" is far too grand a word. It would be more accurate to characterize what's going on as isolated competitive sniper fire.

Still, gasoline prices are dropping across the board, due mainly to a plentiful supply, sagging wholesale prices and normal market pressures, sources in the business said Friday afternoon.

"A few stations may be in price wars," said Andrea Carter of the American Automobile Association in Minneapolis. "A couple

GAS CONTINUED ON 5C ▶

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of stations are reportedly down to 93 cents. I don't know where they are. But prices are coming down, and we have been expecting it."

Prices were considerably over \$1.20 a gallon for several weeks. "At (Fourth of July) holiday time, prices were up to \$1.21," Carter said. "But in the last official survey (three days ago) by Computer Petroleum Center, prices averaged about \$1.15, and I think they are going more towards \$1.09.

"But they aren't as low as 93 cents anywhere else, so I think (Friday's report) was just a small

price war between a couple of stations," Carter added.

A small random check of area stations supports that conclusion.

North Suburban Amoco in Shoreview and B-Dale Amoco in Roseville both were selling unleaded regular for \$1.14 a gallon, and attendants said they had heard nothing about a gas war.

However, one of the stations that triggered the price-war rumors, Johnson Street Auto Service, an independent in northeast Minneapolis, is advertising regular gas for 93.9 cents.

The owner was so busy pumping gas that a customer answered the phone to help out and could offer no further details.

Death rare in procedure

It's very rare for a bone marrow donor to suffer any major complications, much less die, as a result of donating marrow, a spokeswoman for the National Marrow Donor Program said.

Andrea Carter said no donor has ever died in the 7,000 transplants arranged over the last 12 years by the program, which is based in Minneapolis.

"Yes, I would say it's safe to donate marrow based on our track record of 7,000 cases," she said. "Usually the donor's marrow levels return to normal in two to three weeks and they never feel different."

The National Marrow Donor Program is used by patients who need marrow transplants but don't have potential donors among their relatives.

The organization maintains a national registry of volunteer donors. Matching is based on a stringent test of tissue compatibility.

Pamela Sue Fisher, a bone marrow donor who died Friday at a Chicago hospital, and her sister, who received her marrow, would not have used the registry.

Nonetheless, the known risks for donors are the same, whether or not they're related to the recipients, Carter said.

The program states the risk of a donor suffering any kind of a major complication, not necessarily fatal, at 0.1 percent. That's the same as 1 in 1,000.

Problems recovering from anesthesia are the primary potential complication. Donors are put under general anesthesia because the extraction of marrow, typically from the hip bone using syringes, would otherwise be very painful.

A secondary risk is getting an infection from the collection procedure, Carter said.

Only about 30 percent of patients who need bone marrow transplants find donors among their relatives. The other 70 percent must turn to national registries to be matched with donors.

FROM PAGE B1

Donor