Virginians believe higher gasoline prices here to stay

But disagree whether prices are changing their driving habits

RICHMOND, Va. (April 28, 2006) — An overwhelming majority of Virginia respondents thinks gasoline prices will continue to increase over the next six months and that the increases will be permanent.

Those findings are included in a new Commonwealth Poll released Friday by the Virginia Commonwealth University Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory. Among the 773 people responding about the impact of higher gasoline prices, 85 percent believe prices will continue to increase over the next six months, 10 percent believe prices will stay the same and 5 percent think they’ll decline.

The Commonwealth Poll also finds 83 percent of those surveyed think rising gasoline prices will be permanent and 17 percent think the increases are a temporary change.

The Commonwealth Poll was conducted between April 4 and April 18 with 801 adults in Virginia and has an overall margin or error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

“The magnitude of the response percentages shows that fuel prices and energy are top-of-mind issues for large numbers of Virginians,” said David J. Urban, Ph.D., director of The Commonwealth Poll.

Respondents were split over whether the recent gas price increases would prompt them to cut other household spending with 43 percent saying they would cut household spending and 57 percent saying they would not.

The respondents were narrowly split over whether they had changed commuting habits because of the increases, with 51 percent saying they had already made a change and 49 percent saying they had not.

A majority of those who responded said they have reduced the amount of driving they do (62 percent), would consider purchasing a more fuel efficient vehicle (55 percent), and would consider buying a vehicle powered by a gas and electric hybrid engine (66 percent.)

The Virginians surveyed are split over changes in their travel plans because of the gas price increases, with 54 percent of those responding planning no changes in their recreational travel and 46 percent altering their plans.
The survey finds nearly 79 percent of those responding think there are reasonable steps the government can take to significantly lower the cost of gasoline in the United States in the short term.

Among the most important ways to address America’s energy needs, 75 percent of the respondents cited developing alternative sources of energy, 16 percent said finding new sources of coal, gas and oil and 9 percent conservation.

Virginians were united in their belief that the environment should be protected as energy sources are developed, with 72 percent of those responding saying they strongly agree that it is important that the United States focuses on environmental protection issues, 23 percent somewhat agree, 4 percent somewhat disagree and 2 percent strongly disagree.

“People want to explore for more than oil, coal, and gas, and seek alternative energy sources, but they also emphasize environmental protection by huge margins,” said Mark Williams, Ph.D., project director.

More information on the Commonwealth Poll can be found at http://www.vcu.edu/commonwealthpoll/.