



## Fuel theft explodes in Portugal

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Topic: [Demand/Consumption](#)

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During the last weeks disturbing news have been showing the dark side of human nature in face of these new rough times: all across the state, from north to south, littoral to interior, gasoline and diesel theft is spreading like fire. The black market is thriving with people selling diesel and gasoline for 1 €/litre.



*Right: A tank like this can hold up to 1000 litres of diesel, which at today's prices is worth arround 1400 €. Photo by [Getty Images](#).*

Crossposted at the [European Tribune](#).

The word spreads by mouth that someone at some obscure place has gasoline or diesel to sell at prices not seen for years. A tempting offer, when these fuels are sold for 1.5 €/litre and 1.4 €/litre respectively at filling stations. But these fuels have simply been stolen from the same people buying them: the end consumer.

The first news started to come from the north, in the city of Braga, with regular thefts from parked lorries during the night. But now reports are coming from almost everywhere, from the big city centres to the isolated interior of Portugal.

The preferred targets are lorries with tanks large enough to hold 500 to 1000 litres of fuel. During the night thieves approach and force the tank open, then run in a small tube connected to a manual pump that moves the fuel to a hand held jerrycan or similar container. When the opening offers resistance the tank is simply pierced with a pickaxe or other sharp metal tool. In this case, after the jerrycans have been filled the fuel is simple left flowing on the ground.

Beyond lorries, even regular cars and heavy machinery are being targeted by this kind of theft. Construction sites are a tempting place, where heavy cranes and diggers are usually left unguarded during the night. Many businesses are installing surveillance and alarm systems, but without major results, thieves study the place carefully to avoid cameras and using a pickaxe a tank can be emptied swiftly.

Here's a digest of what a haulier business holder told to the *Diário de Notícias* newspaper:

On the 24th of June when the workmen arrived for a new day they found 3 lorries that have been filled up the last night with their tanks completely empty, having been pierced with a pickaxe. They didn't even take half of the diesel, with the remainder spilled on the ground. The company lost more than 4000 € that day from fuel theft in

addition to the cost of repairing 3 fuel tanks.

One month later the smell of spilt diesel still engulfs the facility. Now the lorries are guarded during the night by a man with a licence to carry and use fire arms. On the fence a sign warns: be wary of pitbull dogs.

Many thoughts come to mind reading these news pieces. Like addicts, when the fix dwindles consumers are turning on each other. Before adjusting their lifestyles or finding new arrangements to their daily lives, some consumers seem to opt for the black market, buying fuel that might have been stolen from his neighbour yesterday or from himself the next day.

Life on the slippery slope of oil depletion will likely become much more violent than what we've been used to.

*For reference, some of these news in the Portuguese press:*

[Diário de Notícias](#)  
[Correio da Manhã](#)  
[Lusa](#)

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