

# TECHNICAL *Corner* Concessions

By Wayne Kochanek, ACS Enterprises Inc.



## Go ahead... POP the question

Pop... pop, pop... pop, pop, popcorn! How wonderful that our customers take for granted (as they should) the joy of walking into an auditorium with a super size fresh bag of hot popcorn. Of course, those in the corn popping business know a bit better - it can be a tumultuous ride getting those tiny seeds to consistently expand a thousand times over to guarantee that perfect bag of popcorn.

Let's take a trip down that oil tube of popping wisdom. First, you'll need to absorb the basic concept of how a kettle works. We're talking concept here, understand, there may be a little more mechanics involved on equipment side, but for the most part you'll get the big picture.

Class, come to order. – Kettles are calibrated for a certain amount of seed and oil. They work in harmony with the heat. The heat is turned on and off by a thermostat. (Hang in there!) The thermostat is set for certain low and high temperatures. The high temperature shut off point coincides with the time the seeds have finished popping and by no coincidence the kettle needing to be dumped.

A lot of thought has gone into this marriage of seed, oil and heat and it needs to be preserved for the expansion sake of all future seedlings! (I'm done preaching.) Your machine may beep or a light may illuminate to signal you when the kettle has reached temperature and should be dumped. Of course your ears will tell you when the seeds have stopped popping. **Never leave a machine unattended.**

Here are some basic signs which will help you determine if the calibration on your popper is true. We're not talking deep repairs here, so put the ratchet set down. Sure, there are other variables which may factor in to the performance of your machine and could warrant a service call, but the following go a long way in helping you trouble shoot.

**SEED** – use the right measuring cup. Your manufacture has taken the time to create the perfect cup for your machine, use it. That plastic chemical bottle cut in half is not safe. What size is your machine – 20, 32, 48, 52, or 60 ounces? You should know.

**Too much seed** and the machine will seem to pop slow toward the end because the oil has burned off. You'll get extra seeds in the corn. The color of the corn is good at first but become very white at the end. The machine signals dump before the seeds are done popping,

**Too little seed** and the corn will finish popping early before the heat shuts off. The excess oil could smoke as it burns off. Corn may be dark from oil or oil may spill from the kettle as it is dumped. The machine may signal to dump far after the corn has finished popping.

**OIL** - Set your machine to the right distribution of ounces. Pumps will change the amount of oil dispensed with age - tubes will dry and shrink constricting flow. A tech may have replaced the tubes with longer or shorter runs. Bag and oil line connection may get air leaks slowing oil movement. So... measure the oil on a regular basis and get the right amount. Tip: The standard ratio for seed vs. oil is 3 to 1. That's 3oz of seed for every 1oz of oil. (Check with your manufacturer if you want to vary from this.)

**Too much oil** – Oil also cools the kettle down between cycles and turns the thermostat back on. Too much oil and the kettle will cool too much before getting back up to popping temperature. This can make it seem longer between dumps, cycle times may increase. The first corn out of the kettle will be oil saturated.

**Too little oil** - The kettle will reach temperature faster causing the thermostat to turn the heat off before all the corn is popped. The seeds need oil to pop. Another sign may be the buzzer or indicator light going off early, before you need to dump. You may get burned popcorn at the end of the batch.

**Thermostat set too high** – Danger! Danger! Cycle times may seem shorter, but there is a danger of a fire when the kettle is too hot. Adding oil to a kettle that is too hot can flash fire. This is why we always add seed first and oil second. If you feel your kettle is too hot, first assure seed and oil measurements are correct. Then have a trained technician look at your machine. They may need to adjust or replace the thermostat. The signs on this one can be splattering oil, burned seeds, adverse smoking, discoloration in kettle, indicator signaling dump before seeds are fully popped.

**Thermostat set too low** – Corn will take a long time to pop. It's soggy, not fluffy and little Bobby spits it back at you. Assure corn and seed measure-

ments are correct. Another sign may be the indicator buzzer or light does not come on. Have a trained technician look at it. Here is where the repair variables increase on you.

When is the last time you checked with your manufacturer? They have training books, flyers and even videos to help you understand and educate your staff. Go online to their websites or contact them.

A quick word about energy consumption: Energy Management is huge. Companies are looking to monitor everything these days, from HVAC, to lighting, to the amount of water consumed. The savings can be significant. Here's how you can do your part. Check with your manufacturer on the time it takes to warm up your equipment, it's shorter than you think. Conversely – turn the heat off after popping. It not only saves power, but reduces the wear and tear on your machine. There's no need to have relays, timers, circuit boards and motors snapping on and off trying to heat a kettle with no product. Maybe some day the janitorial crews will be able to sweep the fallen popcorn into an influx regenerator and convert it to energy. Hey, think out of the box.

As always, if you are repairing in-house be safe. Understand your equipment and never guess at proper installation. Call a qualified technician. "Quick" fixes and poor installation only lead to more repairs. ▼

*Wayne Kochanek is Director of Facility Development for ACS Enterprises, a full-service company offering a wide-range of comprehensive programs for the motion picture industry. For additional information, please visit [www.acs-ent.com](http://www.acs-ent.com) or email Wayne at [concession@acs-ent.com](mailto:concession@acs-ent.com).*

# LABOR ISSUES & Updates

## Judge Blocks Video Game Law State Ban On Sales To Minors Called Unconstitutional

*Reprinted from San Jose Mercury News, By Edwin Garcia and Howard Mintz*

SACRAMENTO - A state law intended to bar California retailers from selling or renting violent video games to minors was declared unconstitutional by a federal judge in San Jose who concluded that the legislation violates the First Amendment.

In a 17-page ruling, U.S. District Judge Ronald Whyte permanently blocked the law, which was signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2005 to address mounting concerns that some violent and mayhem-filled video games incite violent behavior in youth. Among other things, the law required video game publishers to put an "18" label on particularly violent games.

The ruling was expected by video game makers - which have seen similar judgments in other states - but Schwarzenegger immediately vowed to appeal the ruling to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Whyte indicated he was "sympathetic" to the concerns of lawmakers, but he found insufficient evidence to continue the law of a connection between violent videos and violence in children.

The evidence does not show that "playing violent video games immediately or necessarily results in real world violence," the judge wrote.

The law, written by Assemblyman Leland Yee, D-San Francisco, hadn't gone into effect; the Video Software Dealers Association and Entertainment Software Association sued the state days after Schwarzenegger signed the measure.

The law, AB 1179, would have prevented those under 18 from buying or renting games depicting serious injury to people "in a manner that is especially heinous, atrocious, or cruel" - a standard that would have been determined by the courts. Retailers in violation would have been fined up to \$1,000.

Schwarzenegger vowed to "vigorously defend this law."

"I signed this important measure to ensure that parents are involved in determining which video games are appropriate for their children," Schwarzenegger said in a statement.

An association of video game retailers said eight similar laws across the nation had been overturned in the past six years, including in Michigan, Washington and Missouri.

"It is now time for the California Legislature to move beyond political grandstanding," said Bo Andersen, president of the Entertainment Merchants Association, "and accept the video game industry's invitation to work with them to educate the public about video game ratings and encourage parents to utilize those ratings when selecting video games for their families."

### Industry's argument

The association, formerly known as the Video Software Dealers Association, challenged the law, arguing that the legislation infringed on free-speech rights and that the issue should be addressed by more parental involvement in the video game habits of their children.

### Game makers agreed.

"Video games should be treated as all other forms of entertainment and not unfairly regulated

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