

Spotlight on Weights & Measures

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COMPLAINTS



For the month of August, we had a wide variety of complaints filed with our office. Below is a general breakdown of the types of complaints that were logged:

- Quantity Control/Price Verification 4
- Commercial Devices 2
- Petroleum (labeling requirements) 1
- Weighmaster Program 1
- Firewood Dealers 1
- Other 3

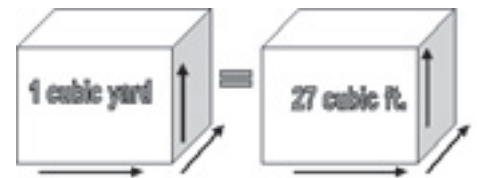
The nature of our complaints varied from “they charged me too much for my alcohol” to “the self-serve beverage recycle machine ripped me off by 25%”.

If you suspect you are on the losing end of a transaction, a word of advice: call our division as soon as possible. Our inspectors can mediate a disagreement or verify what you feel may be an error of a weighed, measured, or a priced transaction. The longer you wait to report the incident the more difficult it becomes for our inspectors to verify your complaint.

Two complaints in August involved suspected short measurement; one was a firewood purchase another was a

purchase of garden bark. If you are going to buy a cord of wood, know what the measured dimensions of a cord are (128 cubic feet). Concurrently when ordering one yard of garden bark, know what the measured dimensions of a cubic yard are (27 cubic feet).

Not all of us own a yardstick but most of us do own a tape measure and as informed consumers could easily convert 3 feet (36 inches) to 1 yard. Remember that a “volume” measurement for soil, cement, etc. is in cubic measurements, so 1 cubic yard is equal to 27 cubic feet.



Moving on to another complaint – whom do you call if your electric circuit breakers keep blowing at your mobile home and the manager of the mobile home park states there is nothing wrong with the breakers and refuses to change them? One complainant called our division with this problem. We have no jurisdiction over the quality or safety of equipment at mobile home parks beyond the sub-meters. However, the Division of Housing a State agency does regulate mobile home park safety issues. Our division was able to make the appropriate referral for this complainant.

CONSUMER TIP

Historical Fuel Prices (Adjusted for inflation)

Year	Price Per Gallon
1950	\$1.91
1955	\$1.85
1960	\$1.79
1965	\$1.68
1970	\$1.59
1975	\$1.80
1980	\$2.59
1985	\$1.90
1990	\$1.51
1995	\$1.28
2001	\$1.66
2002	\$1.31
2003	\$1.52
2004	\$1.79
2005	\$2.28
2006 (so far)	\$3.03

Source: U.S. DOE

Diagram - A

Automobiles are what allow Americans to venture forward in both the world's economy and in our own personal leisure adventures. But without fuel those automobiles would not go very far. Our personal vehicles alone consume 65 billion gallons of gasoline and diesel fuel each year. Americans drive more than 2.5 trillion miles per year in their automobiles, light trucks, and SUVs. Today we drive almost twice as much as we did in 1980 (U.S. Department of Energy).

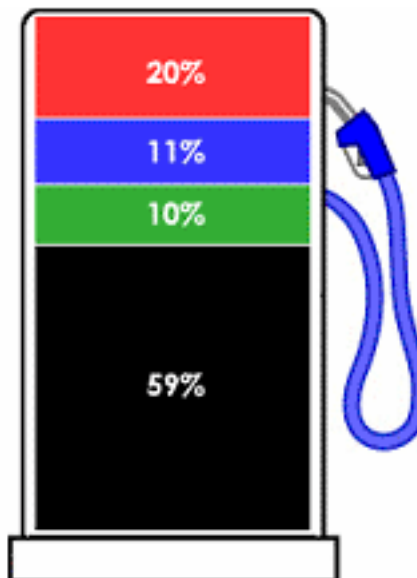
Have you ever wondered what processes are at work in determining the ever-changing price of fuel? Typically the demand for gas spikes during the summer, when masses of people go on vacation. Historically three-day weekend holidays create a high demand for fuel, which translates into higher fuel prices. Price increases generally occur when the world crude-oil market tightens and lowers inventories. Growing demand can sometimes outpace refinery capacity. In addition to capacity, refineries are required to perform maintenance on their facilities, which can place a pinch on the gasoline market. In order to get a true sense of fuel prices a comparison of the prices over the last 55 years needs to be done. (See diagram A).

The media can sometimes lead you to believe that the price of gas is based solely on the price of crude oil and oil companies can raise and lower the price of fuel at will. The true picture is much more complicated. Here is where your money goes when paying for a gallon of fuel. (See diagram B):

1. Crude oil (59%)
2. Refining Costs (10%)
3. Distribution and Marketing (11%)
4. Taxes (20%)

Diagram - B

Taxes
Distribution & Marketing
Refining
Crude Oil



What we pay for in a gallon of regular gasoline (Feb. 2006)
Retail Price: \$2.28/gallon

source: US DOE

CONSUMER TIP

Continued

Local prices are affected by local taxes, competition among local fuel stations, the distance from the refineries, State clean air laws, weather, and world events can all have an impact on the price for a gallon of fuel that you pay for at the pump.

The State of California has its own reformulated rules, which are stricter than the federally mandated clean-fuel laws. Local sales-and-use tax of 20%, an 18.4 ¢ per-gallon federal excise tax and an 18-¢ per-gallon state excise tax are added to the final price.

Don't feel so depressed about the situation. Fuel prices are currently on the way down and when compared to the rest of the world, we don't pay as much as most industrialized nations pay for their fuel. (See Diagram-C).

For more details about the information mentioned above and full details of the story of fuel visit:

<http://money.howstuffworks.com/gas-price.htm>



Diagram - C

Global Fuel Prices*

(1 gallon = 3.8 L)

Most expensive per gallon:

Oslo, Norway:	\$6.99
Hong Kong:	\$6.54
London, UK:	\$6.36
Rome, Italy:	\$6.15
Frankfurt, Germany:	\$6.10

Least expensive per gallon:

Caracas, Venezuela:	\$0.12
Kuwait City, Kuwait:	\$0.78
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia:	\$0.91

*Prices as of June 2006

[Source: CNN Money](#)

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We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.sonoma-county.org/agcomm_weights_measures/