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FUEL FOR THOUGHT

Getting What You Pay for at the Gas Station

As a motorist, you have to buy motor fuel (e.g., gasoline, diesel) and other products at the gas station. At some point, you may wonder if you are GETTING WHAT YOU PAY FOR. The National Conference on Weights and Measures has put together this brochure to assist you in becoming a more informed consumer at the gas station.

What You Can Do at the Pump

Pricing/Computations

Many factors draw motorists to a gas station, and price is near the top of the list. To be sure that you are being charged the correct amount based on the posted price, do the following:

Keep in mind that vehicle tank capacity in the owner's manual is only an estimate. It may hold more or less than the stated capacity.

Check the prices posted on station signs that list the grade of gasoline and type of service you select (full, self, cash/credit). Make sure the price is the same as the price per gallon on the dispenser face for the grade, type of fuel, type of service, and method of payment you select. Carefully note any qualifications or conditions required to obtain the discount for the cash/credit price.

Make sure that the numbers on the face of the dispenser for SALE and GALLONS are set to ZERO before you begin pumping gas. If the previous sale still appears on the dispenser when you start pumping gas, you can become the victim of an "inflated" purchase.

Multiply the indicated gallons delivered by the price per gallon to assure that the dispenser is correctly computing the price. (If you do not have time to do this at the station, **get a receipt** or write the numbers down and do the math at home.)

If you make a credit card purchase, check to be sure you have been charged the correct amount and take your receipt with you.

At full-service stations, observe attendants as they fill your tank or add liquids such as oil, transmission fluid, engine coolant to be sure they add the entire product. Ask the price of these products before the attendant opens the containers.

What Weights and Measures Can Do

Do You Need More Help? Call your State or local Weights and Measures Officials as soon as possible. They will give your questions and complaints high priority. To protect you, the consumer, they do the following:

Inspect new gasoline dispensers as soon as possible after they are installed and then test them regularly.

Pump gasoline into a certified test measure (a container capable of holding a known quantity) to check for accuracy of the product delivered.

Make sure that price computations at the dispenser and the readouts inside the gas station are accurate and agree.

Place an approval seal (sticker) on the dispenser if, at the time of the test, the delivered quantity and pricing are accurate and the dispenser meets all legal requirements.

Many weights and measures offices also check fuel quality and octane rating.

What You Can Do for Safety

Pay Careful Attention!

Petroleum products and gasoline are extremely flammable. Static electricity can cause explosions and fires. To protect yourself, use these precautions:

Shut off the vehicle's engine before refueling.

Do NOT smoke when pumping gas into your vehicle.

Do NOT use your cell phone when pumping gas into your vehicle.

To carry small amounts of fuel, use only approved fuel containers, which are readily available at most hardware and retail stores.

Place portable fuel containers on the ground while you are filling them with gasoline. This assures grounding of the container and reduces the danger of static electric spark.

NEVER fill portable containers while they are inside a vehicle. Static electricity may ignite gasoline fumes. Filling an ungrounded container that is placed on the plastic bed liner of a pickup truck creates an extreme hazard.

Frequently Asked Questions

WHAT IS AN OCTANE RATING AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Octane number is a measure of gasoline's antiknock performance - its ability to resist knocking (a metallic pinging sound) as it burns in a vehicle's engine. When you compare gasoline prices among stations, be careful to compare prices for the same octane. Using high octane gasoline in an engine that is designed for a lower octane is usually not recommended unless your engine knocks. Check your vehicle owner's manual to see which octane the manufacturer recommends.

WHAT ARE "OXYGENATED" AND "REFORMULATED" GASOLINES?

Oxygenated gasoline is conventional gasoline to which chemicals that are rich in oxygen have been added. This increases the octane and/or meets clean air regulations to help reduce carbon monoxide exhaust emissions. Oxygenated gasoline is required during winter months in those metropolitan areas that do not meet the Federal air quality standard for carbon monoxide. The most common oxygenates used are methyl tertiary-butyl ether (MTBE) and ethanol (alcohol). Oxygenated gasoline performs as well as conventional gasoline in most vehicles.

Reformulated gasoline (RFG) is gasoline blended to reduce potentially harmful emissions from vehicles. The Federal Government issues regulations that specify characteristics of the gasoline. Federal RFG is required in those metropolitan areas that do not meet the Federal air quality standard for ozone. If you have questions about the use of oxygenated gasoline (and RFG), in your vehicle, consult the owner's manual.

IMPORTANT FINAL NOTE!

Service station owners are required to keep their dispensers in good working order; however, equipment sometimes fails and mistakes do happen. If you have a problem involving incorrect pricing, short measure, or incorrect octane posting, call your local Weights and Measures Office.

*This information is brought to you by
the National Conference on Weights and Measures
and your local Sealer of Weights and Measures*