



Getting What You **PAY** For

MORE

Suggestions for being an informed consumer



pennsylvania

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

How can you make sure that you're getting what you pay for?

Almost everything we buy is sold by weight, volume, length, count or measure – a dozen eggs, a gallon of gas, a pound of hamburger, a cord of firewood. You don't carry a scale or measuring tape with you to check the weight or measure of everything you buy. How do you know you're getting what you pay for?

Weights and Measures inspectors from the PA Department of Agriculture work behind the scenes to help ensure consumers, businesses and manufacturers are getting exactly what they pay for when purchasing energy products like motor fuels, home delivery heating oil, hard or soft coal, liquid petroleum (LP) gas and fire wood, and at retail stores by inspecting scales and scanners.

Inspectors also check medium and large capacity scales, timing devices like parking meters, grain moisture meters and bulk milk tanks, all to help ensure equity in the marketplace.



Weights and measures inspectors put approval seals, like the one pictured here, on devices that are tested and approved. Inspectors affix rejection seals, also pictured, on devices that are tested and not approved.

Always look for a seal

before using a device, and only use those devices with approval seals on them. If you do not see a seal, ask the store manager. Contact your weights and measures office if the seal is missing.

To make sure you're getting what you pay for, always:

- Look for an up-to-date inspection approval seal near the total sale display on each device
- Check that the device is set to zero before anything is measured
- Pay only for the measured amount of product, not the packaging
- Review your receipt to ensure the amount billed is the amount received

Motor Fuels

Weights and measures officials check fuel pumps annually for accuracy. Inspectors measure fuel in cubic inches; there are 231 cubic inches (or 256 tablespoons) in one gallon of fuel. An error of plus or minus six (+/- 6) cubic inches per five (5) gallons (approximately 1 tablespoon per gallon) is the maximum error allowed before a fuel pump is rejected.

Ensure you're getting what you pay for by:

- Being sure you are using the correct pump. The octane rating and price per gallon should be clearly marked on each fuel pump.
- Ensuring an up-to-date inspection approval seal is attached to each fuel pump.

- Making sure the device is set to zero before any gasoline is pumped.
- Checking the price by multiplying the number of gallons by the unit price. Be sure this shows as the total due.
- Figuring the cash discount, if any. Check that you are charged the right amount.
- If using a credit card, check your receipt to ensure the amount billed is the amount on the pump.

Home Delivery Heating Oil

Home heating oil is the primary energy source for most homeowners. When the oil is delivered or in a mailed invoice, the fuel provider must give the customer a printed ticket indicating the number of gallons delivered and the price.

Ensure you're getting what you pay for by:

- Purchasing fuel oil from a reputable dealer whose meters have been tested and approved for accuracy by weights and measures inspectors.
- Making sure the delivery meter ticket is inserted into the meter at the point of delivery. Tickets may not be in the meter while the truck is in motion.
- Knowing your tank capacity and check the tank's meter before and after deliveries.

Coal (Hard or Soft)

Coal was once the most commonly-used form of energy until the advent of fuel oil, and now clean coal is staging a vigorous comeback as a home heating source. Most coal users purchase coal by the ton and have it delivered to their basements.

Ensure you're getting what you pay for by:

- Coal must be accompanied by the original weighmaster's certificate, given to the purchaser at the time of delivery.
- All weighmaster certificates must indicate the gross, tare and net weight of the delivery.
- Know the cubic foot dimensions of your coal bin. Most coal weighs 55 pounds per cubic foot. A ton of coal should occupy about 36 cubic feet.

Liquid Petroleum Gas

In areas where piped-in natural gas is not readily available, many homeowners use home-delivered Liquid Petroleum (LP) gas pumped into a home storage tank from a delivery truck. Some vehicles use LP gas as fuel. In some cases, LP gas may be sold in portable containers known as “bottles.” Bottled LP gas is sold by weight with the tare weight (weight of the container) stamped on the bottle.

Ensure you’re getting what you pay for:

- On metered deliveries, the seller is required to state on the invoice the date of delivery, name and address of vendor and purchaser and the quantity of product delivered in terms of approved units of measure.
- When refilling a portable tank, such as one used for an outdoor grill, check for an up-to-date approval seal on the scale device.
- Make sure your tank is in good repair with no rust spots or other signs of external weakness.

Firewood

Firewood is sold by a measurement called the “cord.” A cord is 128 cubic feet of firewood. To be sure you have a cord, stack and measure the wood. For example, a cord of firewood can be stacked into a pile that is:

4 feet wide, 4 feet high and 8 feet long
($4 \times 4 \times 8 = 128$); or

2 feet wide, 4 feet high and 16 feet long
($2 \times 4 \times 16 = 128$).

A cord of wood can be stacked in other arrangements as long as the width times the height multiplied by the length (all in feet) equals 128 cubic feet.

Ensure you’re getting what you pay for by:

- Not buying from sellers using terms like “truckload,” “face cord,” “rack” or “pile.”

- Asking the seller to stack the wood (you may have to pay extra for this service) or stack the wood yourself.
- Getting a receipt showing the seller’s name, address and phone number, the price, and the amount and kind of wood. Record the license number of the delivery vehicle.
- Measuring the wood pile before using any wood. Photograph it if you think it measures less than a cord.
- Contacting the seller before burning any wood if you feel there is a problem. If the problem cannot be resolved, contact your weights and measures office before burning any wood.

Groceries

Pay Only for the Product, Not the Packaging

If you buy potato salad at the deli counter, you should pay only for the salad, not the weight of the container.

In many stores, the electronic or computerized scales used at the checkout counter automatically deduct the weight of the packaging, or “tare.” On other scales, the sales clerk must adjust the scale to deduct the tare weight.

Make sure you get what you pay:

- Scales must be placed so you can see the weight. If you have a question, ask to have the package weighed again before you buy. Was the tare weight deducted?
- Make sure the scale shows a zero or minus sign before anything is weighed.
- Read the label. Package labels give consumers helpful information, including the amount of product in the package, shown as a weight, measure or count like ounces, pounds, quarts, liters or square feet.

If you have a question about how the store weighs or measures products, ask the store manager. If the problem is not resolved, contact your local weights and measures office.

Compare Prices

Food makes up a significant part of a family budget. To help make sure you get the most for your money, it is important to compare the price, amount and quality of similar products.

Unit pricing can help by telling consumers the cost per “unit” (per ounce, per pound, per sheet) of the product.

It’s easy to find the unit price. For some items, the price can be found on the price sign. For example, if apples cost \$1.99 per pound, you know that five pounds of apples will cost \$9.95 (5 pounds x \$1.99). In other cases, the unit price may be listed on the price label on the product shelf.

Help make sure you’re getting what you pay for:

- Look for unit price labels on shelves or signs near the items.
- Compare the unit prices of similar products to find the best buy.
- If the unit price is incorrect or missing, report it to the store manager. Ask the manager to post or correct the unit price information.

If the problem is not resolved, contact your local weights and measures office.

Check the Price

Stores use electronic scanners that determine the price of an item at the check-out counter by reading a code on the product. While many weights and measures inspectors test scanners to ensure you are being charged the correct price, you can help.

Ensure you’re getting what you pay for:

- Watch as the price of the item shows on the check-out register.
- Ask the clerk to check the price if you think the scanned price is incorrect.
- If the scanned price does not agree with the posted price, ask the store manager to correct the problem.
- Save your receipt in case you have a question or problem later.

If the problem is not resolved, contact your local weights and measures office.

Questions or Concerns?

If you have a problem with a weights or measures issue, talk with the store manager or owner first.

If the manager cannot or will not resolve the problem or answer questions to your satisfaction, take one of the following courses of action:

- Call the toll-free tip line at 1-877-TEST-007.
- Contact your local weights and measures office.
- Complete an online Consumer Complaint Form.

A complete contact list of regional weights and measures offices, as well as Consumer Complaint Forms, is available by visiting www.agriculture.state.pa.us, clicking first on Bureaus and then on Ride & Measurement Standards.