

Dealing with High Gas Prices



consumer *brief*

Gasoline prices in the U.S. have fluctuated greatly over the last year, making it difficult for consumers to budget for transportation costs.

While we cannot regulate market conditions, government officials can and are closely monitoring gas station pumps and business practices to ensure that consumers get exactly what they pay for.

New Jersey's Office of Weights and Measures inspectors protect honesty in the marketplace by using highly accurate equipment to inspect all types of scales, meters and scanning equipment. All gas station pumps must be registered with the State. Weights and Measures officials conduct inspections at gas stations to ensure that pumps are dispensing accurate amounts of fuel, that pumps and hoses are not damaged, that advertised prices accurately reflect the price being charged, and that prices do not change more than once a day.

What's a consumer to do? Listed below is information on how to use less gasoline, how to avoid being scammed, and how to get the greatest mileage out of a gallon of gas.

SAVING GAS AS YOU DRIVE

In these days of high prices, consumers want to be certain that they are getting the highest possible gasoline mileage. Tips to increase mileage include:

- Don't idle. Engines "warm up" faster when driving. It's more fuel efficient to turn off the engine than to idle for any longer than 30 seconds.
- Don't drive aggressively. Hard acceleration and braking wastes fuel, which lowers mileage by five percent in cities and by an incredible 33% on highways.

- Drive no faster than the speed limit. Each five m.p.h. over 60 costs you an additional 10 cents a gallon.
- Unload before you leave. At highway speeds, half of the engine power goes to overcoming aerodynamic "drag." Driving with loaded roof racks and even empty ski racks wastes gas.
- Turn off the air conditioner when you can. It robs power from the engine and uses additional fuel. If the weather permits, use the flow-through ventilation system instead of rolling down your car windows.
- Buy regular gasoline. If your car specifies regular fuel, don't buy premium under the mistaken belief that your engine will benefit. If your car's manufacturer specifies premium, you may wish to contact the manufacturer to ask if it's all right to use regular instead. Most cars run fine on regular, which generally is at least 10% less expensive than higher grades of gas.

IMPROVING VEHICLE EFFICIENCY

- Watch your tires. Under-inflated tires require more energy to move the car, which wastes fuel. Check the tire pressure at least once a month, when tires are cold. Being under inflated by just two p.s.i. (pounds per square inch) can increase fuel use by one percent. Replace worn tires with the same make and model tires as were on your car when it was new.
- Get a tune up. Maintaining your car with regular tune ups can save you up to six cents per gallon. A clogged air filter alone can rob fuel efficiency.

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- Buy vehicles with excellent gas mileage, and drive your most fuel-efficient vehicle whenever possible. The most efficient vehicles can save up to 50% on the cost of gas.
- Follow the manufacturer's recommendations for preventive maintenance.

TIPS WHEN BUYING GASOLINE

Getting what you pay for at the pump.

- Consider buying off-brand gasoline, which most often is identical to the gasoline sold at franchised gas stations.
- Look for the decal indicating that the gasoline pumps have been tested by the Office of Weights and Measures. Pumps are tested annually.
- Make sure the price advertised on street signs and pump signs is the same as the price shown on the pump itself.
- Check to see whether the gas station charges more per gallon for credit card purchases than for transactions paid for with cash. If a gas station chooses to do this, State law requires that the station clearly mark the prices for cash *AND* for credit purchases on its signs.
- Make sure attendants have reset the pump to zero before filling your tank.
- Make sure that the pump does not indicate that it has pumped more gasoline than your car's tank can hold.

PAYING FOR YOUR GASOLINE

Pay attention as you pay for your gas. Check that:

- The total number of gallons you received corresponds with the total price you have been charged.
- The price the attendant says you owe matches the total sale price on the pump.
- The number of gallons, the price per gallon, and the total amount of the sale are printed on any credit receipts you sign, and always check your receipt against your credit card statement.
- If your car starts "pinging" or "bucking" after you have filled your gas tank (especially with premium), the station may be selling gasoline with a lower octane rating than is stated on the pump.

Whenever possible, watch as the attendant swipes your credit card. Unfortunately, it's becoming more and more common for dishonest attendants to swipe your card more than once, which results in extra charges showing up on your monthly credit card statement. Request a receipt to ensure that you're being charged the correct amount.

If you experience problems with any of the issues mentioned above, try to resolve the difficulty with the gas station manager or owner. If you cannot resolve the matter to your satisfaction, please contact your county or municipal weights and measures office or New Jersey's Office of Weights and Measures.

For more information about the New Jersey Office of Weights and Measures, go to:

www.NJConsumerAffairs.gov/owm.htm
or call 732-815-4840.

If you wish to file a complaint with the Division of Consumer Affairs, go to:

www.NJConsumerAffairs.gov or call 800-242-5846.



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