



STATE OF IDAHO

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NEWS RELEASE

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, AAA IDAHO OFFER GAS-SAVINGS TIPS FOLLOWING SURGE IN PRICES

(BOISE) The Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) and AAA Idaho are offering drivers tips to make sure they get their money's worth as gasoline prices surge following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina.

The department's Bureau of Weights and Measures conducts unannounced inspections of gas stations and tests thousands of gas pumps a year for accuracy. You can tell an ISDA-inspected pump by looking for a department inspection sticker on the pump.

"We understand the concern over high fuel prices. Consumers demand that we do our part to make sure they get their dollars' worth, particularly in times like these," said Tom Schafer, Bureau Chief of ISDA's Bureau of Weights and Measures. "Idahoans can be assured that we are hard at work checking the accuracy of fuel pumps and quality of the fuel they buy."

AAA Idaho said Thursday that gasoline prices in some parts of the state are in the \$2.85 range, but are expected to move to more than \$3.00 a gallon in next few days. "With prices this high, motorists are looking for ways to make sure they get the most out of every dollar they spend," said AAA Idaho spokesman Dave Carlson.

In 2004, the Idaho State Department of Agriculture's nine inspectors tested virtually all of the gasoline pumps in the state. On average they found problems with 5 percent of the 19,000 pumps tested. Pumps are rejected for volume measurement as well as problems that are mechanical in nature such as bad anti-drain valves or malfunctioning displays.

Inspectors test the pumps by using methods developed by the National Conference on Weights and Measures. In addition to pumping the fuel into precisely calibrated vessels, they inspect the devices to ensure the meters are correctly calculating the charges, and that other mechanical features are in place and working.

Measurement tolerances are very strict, Schafer said. To pass, the pumps must

deliver within 0.5 percent of the quantity tested. How much is 0.5 percent? On a 20-gallon purchase, the total must be within 12.8 fluid ounces of the amount delivered – slightly more than a regular can of soda.

When inspectors find a gas pump that is out of tolerance, they tag it as “rejected for repairs” and require that the station have the pump repaired. Schafer emphasized that the inspector’s mission is to not only protect the public, but to promote fair competition among businesses.

When it comes to octane levels, Idaho drivers are getting what they pay for. ISDA began a monitoring program in 1991 and found a compliance rate of 72 percent. In 2004, compliance was at 95 percent, and all of the regular, unleaded fuel tested met quality standards. According to Schafer, the program is an effective deterrent to those attempting to sell low-quality fuel to Idaho consumers.

Motorists can take some precautions to make sure they aren’t overpaying at the pump:

- Make sure the display is set to zero before pumping any gas.
- Make sure the correct price or any discounts you qualify for are reflected in the price before you start filling your tank.
- Check the price by multiplying the number of gallons by the unit price and check your receipt before you leave the station.
- Make sure you are using the proper grade of fuel. Most cars run on regular fuel and don’t need the more expensive, higher octane fuel. Check your owner’s manual for vehicle requirements.

AAA statistics show that the average vehicle is driven about 12,000 miles a year, using about 550 gallons of gas annually. More than half of all households in the United States own two or more vehicles. To get the best fuel efficiency, AAA suggests:

- Consolidate trips and errands to cut down on drive time and miles.
- Slow down. The faster you go, the more fuel you burn.
- Avoid jackrabbit starts.
- Lighten the load. Don’t haul extra weight in your trunk, cargo area or passenger compartment.
- Keep your car tuned and your tires properly inflated.
- Avoid traveling during rush hours to reduce fuel consumption in stop and go traffic.
- Use your air conditioner sparingly.

The Weights and Measures Program responds to complaints about motor fuel, and can be reached at (208) 332-8690 or e-mail weights@idahoag.us. Or visit the ISDA website at <http://www.idahoag.us>. AAA publishes public-service information on car care, fuel economy, and safety. You can visit your local AAA club or go to <http://www.aaa.com> for more information.

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