



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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Alert to shoppers and business owners:

Price scanner survey shows it pays to slow down and inspect your receipt

OLYMPIA – Consumers and business owners would both benefit by paying attention to prices ringing up on thousands of scanners across the state. In a survey conducted by the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) and the City of Seattle Consumer Affairs Unit, it appears that consumers are just as likely to be undercharged as overcharged.

WSDA and Seattle staff checked nearly 11,000 items at 145 stores, ranging from department stores to small retail specialty stores in a survey conducted in November. The error rate for both overcharges and undercharges was just over 3 percent when scanned prices were compared with posted prices.

The results show that when consumers were overcharged, the average additional expense was \$5.97. Overcharges ranged from as little as 10 cents to \$74.80. The average undercharge in the consumers' favor was higher—\$7.40. Undercharges ranged from a mere 2 cents to \$80.

“We aim to provide consumer protection services, but our services also help business owners,” said Kirk Robinson, manager of the WSDA Weights & Measures Program. “Doing a scanner survey supports a level playing field in commerce. We want both parties to be confident in their transaction.”

Twenty-one of the 145 stores targeted in the scanner verification survey failed testing criteria. The test consisted of sampling an average of 75 items from the store's shelves and racks. To pass the test, no more than 2 percent of the items sampled could ring up at higher than posted or advertised prices.

WSDA intends to return to stores that failed the survey to do a follow-up inspection. In addition, plans calls for additional inspections early in 2008 to check on post-holiday scanner accuracy.

“For their own protection, shoppers need to take a minute to check that they are getting the sale price or posted discount on their purchases,” Robinson said. “If a scanning error isn't fixed to your satisfaction, call your Weights & Measures or consumer affairs office.”

Robinson offers the following shopping tips to avoid scanner problems:

- Watch the cash register display at the check-out counter;
- Ask questions if you are concerned about suspected errors;
- Note prices and the posted discounts as you shop;
- Bring ads with you; and
- Check your receipt and resolve any problems before you leave the store.

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For scan price disputes in Seattle, call (206) 386-1296. In Spokane, call (509) 625-6611. For other areas, call WSDA at (360) 902-1857 or send an e-mail to wtsmeasures@agr.wa.gov.

Weights & Measures officials work to ensure equity in the marketplace. Inspectors test weighing and measuring devices such as gas pumps, grocery store scales, scanners, and truck scales. They inspect packaged, canned and bottled products to ensure consumers are receiving the full measure stated on the package label. Officials are also charged with verifying the quality of motor fuel.

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