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Colorado Consumers Can Shop With Confidence



The holiday shopping season has come to a close but those New Year's markdowns will keep the shopping frenzy going. Consumers can breathe a sigh of relief this year all thanks to the Colorado Department of Agriculture's Inspection and Consumer Services (ICS) Division. Inspectors with the ICS Measurement Standards Retail Program perform price verification/scanner tests throughout the year as part of their consumer protection duties. The holiday season is no exception.

Each year, ICS inspectors conduct an inspection sweep or "scan blitz" of Colorado stores that cater to holiday shoppers. The scan sweep was conducted during the first week in December, 2011, and over 15,000 items were checked in 267 retail stores throughout the state. Overall pricing accuracy in these businesses was 97%. Only five stores out of the 267 failed the test due to excessive overcharges.

"Advertising one price for a given item and charging a higher price is against the law," said Nick Brechun, CDA Measurement Standards Retail Program Administrator. "Retailers are aware of how important accurate prices are in maintaining customer satisfaction. However, inexperienced employees, higher sales volumes, and more sales may lead to increased pricing errors during the holidays."



Officials at the Colorado Department of Agriculture urge consumers to always check their receipts. Department inspectors visit retailers throughout the year to ensure that consumers pay only the advertised price. Pricing accuracy inspections are conducted at grocery and department stores, drug stores, auto and office supply outlets, convenience stores, and other retail businesses that use electronic scanning devices and UPC look-up equipment. Retail establishments are selected either randomly or using a risk-based inspection system. Using the risk-based inspection system, stores that fail testing are retested until improvement has been demonstrated.

During inspections, items to scan are chosen according to guidelines developed by the National Institute of Standards and Technology. The amount of items tested vary depending on store size, however the typical store will have between 50-100 items inspected for its advertised price accuracy. A business fails when more than two percent of the prices checked are found to be overcharges. Stores that fail are subject to stop orders and civil penalties. Undercharges are also noted and brought to the store's attention at the time of inspection, but are not counted toward the business' pass or fail rate.

To avoid being overcharged, consumers should be aware of prices listed on the shelf, product tag, or advertisement. Inaccuracies should be reported to the store's management.

For additional information, or to file a pricing error complaint, contact the Colorado Department of Agriculture Measurement Standards at (303) 477-4220 or visit the [Inspection and Consumer Services Division website](#).