

PRESS RELEASE

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CONSUMER COMPLAINTS RISE WITH FUEL PRICES

(DENVER) – Gas prices across the nation are 38.3% higher than a year ago but according to AAA, those higher gas prices won't keep Americans from hitting the road over the Memorial Day holiday weekend, the traditional kick-off to the nation's summer driving season. Almost 35 million Americans have made travel plans this weekend, up slightly from last year.

More driving, coupled with an increase in fuel prices is resulting in an increase in the number of consumer complaints, according to the Colorado Division of Oil and Public Safety, within the Department of Labor and Employment. The Division inspects gas pumps for accuracy of calibration. Often, consumers give little thought to the accuracy of a gas pump, or fuel quality postings on dispenser labels. However, when prices increase, consumers pay greater attention, say inspectors.

In addition to making sure that gas pump meters are not erring in the retailer's favor, inspectors verify that the calibration mechanisms are sealed from tampering, look for leaks, evaluate advertising practices and price computations, and test fuel quality.

Mahesh Albuquerque, Director of the Division of Oil and Public Safety, said over 28,000 gas pumps were inspected in 2010, and 97% were found to be accurate and within acceptable tolerance limits. Of the 3% that were out of tolerance, two thirds were dispensing more than the meter registered, favoring the consumer.

Because of routine wear and tear, seals and valves inside pump meters gradually deteriorate, allowing more gas to flow through than the meter registers, giving consumers a bonus. Only one third of the 3% of gas pumps that were out of tolerance were shorting the consumer. In those cases, meters get clogged and malfunction, giving customers slightly less gas than they pay for. On the quality side, more than 99% of the gasoline and diesel tested meet specifications.

While the Division responds to several hundred consumer complaints every year, the number of documented violations does not tend to increase with fuel prices. He added, “Our inspectors perform unannounced inspections throughout the year, not just when prices are high and our low non-compliance rates indicates that the routine regulation by weights and measures officials is doing its job in protecting the marketplace.”

If inspectors find that a pump's discrepancy is more than 6 cubic inches (3.3 ounces) per 5 gallons, they adjust the meters or place them out of service until repaired, whether the pumps are giving too much or too little.

“We don’t favor the retailer or the consumer,” Albuquerque said. “We're in favor of accuracy and equity in the marketplace.”

The increased diligence by consumers in observing and reporting issues of concern is appreciated and helps guide officials to potential problems and enables prompt resolutions.

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