

WALTER D. LeVINE

345 WALNUT STREET
LIVINGSTON, NEW JERSEY 07932

Telephone (973) 377-3313
Telefax (973) 377-8167
E-Mail TAXLAW1@AOL.COM

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GAS PRICING ALERT!

As Director of our Consumer Affairs Office, I received several complaints last week regarding our local gas stations, alleging fraud in advertising of gas prices; involving cash and credit differentials. I initiated my own investigation, and contacted the State and Essex County offices which regulate gas pricing and advertising, so they could conduct their own investigations.

By this letter, I am both advising the community of NJ law and informing our residents of helpful suggestions in this time of escalating gas prices.

Check that the pricing displayed on road signs actually matches the price shown at the pump!

Where stations charge different prices for payment in cash or by credit card, the law requires that road signs need only show price differentials for only one grade of gasoline, regardless of the number of grades they sell. Plus, stations do not have to offer price differentials for all grades. Stations do not have to offer price differentials at all. Finally, regardless of their good intentions, stations cannot offer a price, whether for cash or credit, below the State average for that grade of gas, calculated at the lowest average price for that grade and similar payment. So, even if a station wishes to assist consumers by offering a price differential, or even offering a "loss leader", they are limited by law to what they can charge.

Further, no one will know what the true cost is, until they get to the pump itself, which must advertise the prices for all grades and any price differentials between cash and credit payment.

What is worse, consumers lured into a station by a price-favorable road sign, could still be bilked, so here are the suggestions I offer and which are also suggested by the State and County:

1. Always be sure the pump price matches the road sign price. Also check that your grade is covered by any price differential.
2. Always check the pricing at the pump itself. This is the only place price differentials must be advertised.
3. Check the pump to be sure the "blue" Weights and Measures seal is displayed, which verifies the pump has been inspected and tested.
4. Be sure the attendant sets the pump to zero and sets the proper price before starting to pump.
5. Ask for a receipt, to verify you have been charged the proper price.
6. Check credit card bills to be sure (A) they match your receipt and (B) you have not been double billed for your purchase (some consumers have complained of this).
7. Some credit cards offer their own rebates for gas purchases. Calculate which is better, the cash discount from the station or the rebate your credit card offers. At today's prices, the rebate may be a greater saving.
8. Prices can only be changed once every 24 hours.

If you find your station is in violation, call the Essex County office at (973)-395-8363, or the State office at (732)-815-4840.

Sincerely,
Walter D. LeVine