



**To: Newsroom Directors and Assignment Editors**

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## **DDA advises consumers to be careful when purchasing firewood, heating oil, and propane**

The first day of fall was last week, September 22. We haven't felt a big chill in the air as yet, but advertisements about purchasing home heating fuel abound over the air waves. The Delaware Department of Agriculture (DDA), as a consumer protection agency, urges consumers to do their part to protect themselves when purchasing firewood and other home heating fuels.

DDA's Weights and Measures Inspectors test all weighing and measuring devices, including pumps and meters on fuel trucks, used in sales made to the public. After testing and ensuring the accuracy of the measuring device, the Weights and Measures Inspector then seals the device. The device is sealed with a lead wire or plastic security seal. This seal prevents a vendor from changing the calibration of the device. Once the device has been sealed, the inspector places a two-inch square vinyl seal of approval prominently on the device to inform consumers that an accuracy check was performed during a certain month and year.

DDA's Weights and Measures Section has some advice to help consumers get what they pay for when purchasing heating oil, propane, and firewood.

### **When purchasing home heating oil, the consumer should:**

- Determine the size of his home fuel tank
- Ask the company for a tank chart, which converts inches of fuel to gallons
- Use a yardstick or other measuring stick to determine how many inches of fuel is in the home tank before the purchase
- If at all possible, be home for the delivery and watch the meter, which should be visible to the buyer
- Only accept a printed delivery ticket, which was inserted into the metering device after the fuel truck arrived at the home. Never accept a ticket, which was "hanging out of the meter" when the truck arrived. Printed delivery tickets are mandatory in Delaware.
- Determine how many inches of fuel are in the tank following delivery.
- Calculate the difference and convert to gallons.
- Compare the measurement with the amount listed on the sales ticket.
- Report any problems to the fuel company, and if not satisfied with the result, contact the DDA Weights and Measures Section at (800) 282-8685 (DE only) or (302) 698-4500.

### **When purchasing propane, the consumer should:**

- If at all possible, be home for the delivery and watch the meter, which should be visible to the buyer
- Only accept a printed delivery ticket, which was inserted into the metering device after the fuel truck arrived at the home. Never accept a ticket, which was "hanging out of the meter" when the truck arrived. Printed delivery tickets are mandatory in Delaware.

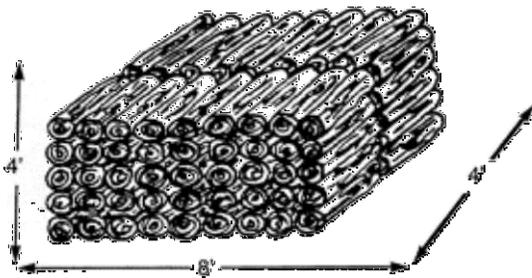
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Steve Connors, DDA Weights and Measures Administrator says, "I believe the majority of winter fuel sellers are playing by the rules. With most problems, it's an honest mistake and sellers will do what is fair. Sometimes, however, honest people have not maintained their equipment, and this causes inaccuracies in measurements of delivery. However, to protect themselves, consumers should beware of dishonest salespeople, who may do things such as pumping a portion of the fuel back into the delivery truck tank. The meter will show that, for example, 200 gallons were delivered, but only 150 gallons actually were pumped into the home fuel tank. The bottom line is, don't be afraid to report problems to the DDA Weights and Measures Section. DDA can take steps to ensure the seller honestly represents the amount of fuel being sold or can order sales to stop."

### Firewood

The most important thing to remember about firewood sales is that they must be measured in cords. The only **legal method** of selling firewood is by the cord. According to Steve Connors, Weights and Measures Section Administrator, "Firewood has to be sold by the cord. A cord is a volumetric measurement. Nothing else is legal." Connors said "Many people don't know what a cord is. Consumers really cannot tell what a cord is unless it is stacked up and measured.

**4' X 4' X 8' = 128 Cubic feet = a Cord**



A cord of wood always measures **128 cubic feet** - 128 cubic feet of compactly stacked wood in a rectangular form. It can be **4' X 4' X 8'** (four feet high by four feet wide by eight feet long). It can be **2' X 8' X 8'** (two feet high by eight feet wide by eight feet long). It just has to stack up to 128 cubic feet.

The wood should be stacked with the pieces parallel to each other. Wood stacked in a crisscross or log cabin fashion does not meet the legal definition; and most likely the stack will contain less wood than one that is stacked by the legal parallel method.

Regulation prohibits the sale of firewood in unspecified quantities such as "load," "truckload," "face cord," "rack," or "pile." If a buyer purchases more than 100 pounds of wood, the seller is **required** to inform the buyer about the cord equivalent of the purchase of firewood. Fractions of cords are allowed to be sold when identified as such.

DDA encourages firewood consumers to adhere to the following guidelines:

- When placing the order, ask how the seller measures the wood and make sure those standards are precise and accurate.
- Don't assume terms such as truckload, face cord, rack or pile guarantee the amount of firewood is a cord.
- Don't pay for the wood unless it has been stacked and measured.

If you are a first time buyer, ask people you know to recommend sellers with whom they've had positive business dealings.

- Always get a receipt with the seller's name, address and telephone number, and the price, amount and kind of wood bought. Write down the license number of the delivery vehicle.
- Take a picture of the stack if you think there is less than a cord.

Don't burn any wood if you believe you have a problem. Contact the seller first.

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