



Chris Danou's Capitol Report

Make Sure the Price Is Right When Back-to-School Shopping

I wanted to expand on last week's column to provide some tips for back to school shoppers. Back-to-school time can be a difficult time for any family and I wanted to provide as much helpful information as possible. As the back-to-school shopping season is in full swing, consumers are looking for bargains. Newspaper advertisements and in-store promotions promise discounts at the checkout. But state consumer protection officials say there can be a difference between the price you think you are paying – and the price you actually pay. Watch carefully at the checkout to make sure you're being charged accurately. Wisconsin law requires stores to charge the lowest advertised price and refund any overcharge.

The Bureau of Consumer Protection encourages consumers to take an active role in preventing price scanner errors. Some things consumers can do to be sure they are charged the right price:

- Write down prices or special sales as you shop.
- Bring store ads with you.
- Watch display screens as items are being scanned.
- Speak up if you think you are overcharged.
- Demand any appropriate refund while you are still in the store.
- Ask about a store's pricing error policy.
- Report pricing errors to state or local inspectors.

Last year, DATCP weights and measures inspectors tested more than 29,000 items for price accuracy in stores all around the state. The total price scanner accuracy rate for 2010 was 96.8%. That percentage includes both overcharges and undercharges. In addition, the 2010 inspection results show consumers were either paying the advertised price or paying less than the advertised price 99.2% of the time. This is called the consumer confidence rate.

In addition to regularly checking price scanners for accuracy, Wisconsin inspectors also make sure gas pumps and store scales are accurate, as well as package weights. Inspectors protect buyers and sellers in nearly all sales of goods. Special thanks to the Wisconsin State Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer protect for providing my office with this helpful information.

For more weights and measures information, or to file a complaint, contact the Bureau of Consumer Protection on the web datcp.wisconsin.gov; via e-mail at datcphotline@wi.gov; or call toll-free at 1-800-422-7128.