

Tuesday, October 18, 2005

DCA INSPECTING HEATING OIL DELIVERY TRUCKS AND OFFERS FUEL PURCHASING TIPS TO HOMEOWNERS

DCA Inspections Help Ensure Homeowners Get the Heating Oil They Pay For

The New York City Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) today reminded New York homeowners to prepare for the expected high-price of heating oil by making careful purchasing decisions and to take the necessary steps to ensure they don't get shortchanged.

"The unpredictability of heating oil costs this winter makes it even more crucial that homeowners exercise caution when entering into contracts and that DCA makes sure they get what they pay for," said Jonathan Mintz, DCA Acting Commissioner. "Look for the DCA sticker on the back of the truck and ask for the inspection certificate to show that the meter is registering accurately and that the equipment is locked and tamper-proof. Also, consumers with existing contracts should read them carefully -- especially to note any clauses in fixed-price agreements that nonetheless may allow for price increases."

DCA inspects home heating oil delivery truck meters annually and citywide compliance is at 91%. Meters that are in violation are condemned on the spot, ordered repaired and retested by the DCA before allowed to operate. During these routine inspections, the DCA confirms that the truck's meter accurately registers how much oil it pumps, and places an official seal on the back of each truck where it is easily visible. A faulty meter might register that more home heating oil was dispensed than the consumer actually received. DCA also checks for faulty air eliminator devices because without an intact seal, retailers could modify their meters and increase the chance of shortchanging their customers.

Last year the DCA inspected approximately 1,000 delivery trucks and condemned 88 meters, or 9% of all meters inspected. Inspections are done during visits to truck refueling terminals throughout the City, as well as at the agency's test station in Brooklyn.

According to the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), the average price for home heating oil in New York City for the week of October 10, 2005 was \$2.81 per gallon, as compared to \$2.15 the same time last year.

DCA offers the following tips to homeowners:

- **Check the truck's meter for an official DCA seal.**
- **Ask to see a copy of the company's certificate of inspection.**

The official DCA seal located on the back of each fuel oil truck, and certificate of inspection certifies that the truck has been inspected, and when.

- **Get a written contract and read the fine print.**

Always get a written contract that includes all costs, delivery schedule, gallons promised, and any other details that have been agreed upon between the provider and customer. Make sure that the salesperson or manager of the distributor signs the contract before payment.

Also, BEFORE SIGNING, check for any price-changing clauses such as how firmly your agreement locks you in if the prices goes down or how well you are protected against price increases, other hidden costs, fees, or minimum purchasing requirements that may appear in the contract.

- **Check your receipt.**

By law, retailers must provide a receipt showing how much oil was received and how much was paid per unit.

- **Check your own oil tank gauge before and after filling.**

Although some gauges may be inaccurate due to age, many can give a rough estimate of how much oil was received.

- **Use a reputable supplier.**

Call 311 to check a retailer's history with the DCA.

In addition, the NYC Department of Buildings (DOB) licenses oil burner installers. Check with DOB by calling 311 to make sure your installer is licensed. Homeowners can also reduce energy use by winterizing their home. For more information, go online to www.NYC.gov/buildings. Also for homeowners and multi-family building owners, check the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD)'s energy saving tips at www.NYC.gov/hpd.

DCA enforces the City's Consumer Protection Law, Weights and Measures Law, and other related laws at thousands of businesses throughout New York City. Fostering a marketplace where consumers are protected and honest businesses can thrive, DCA licenses more than 60,000 businesses in 55 different categories citywide.

For more information or to file a complaint, call 311 or visit the DCA online at www.NYC.gov/consumers.