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CONSUMER AFFAIRS OFFERS HOME HEATING OIL PURCHASING TIPS AND INSPECTS DELIVERY TRUCKS AS THE WINTER SEASON APPROACHES

DCA Helps Ensure Homeowners Get the Heating Oil They Pay For; 92% of Delivery Trucks Pass Department's Inspection

The New York City Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) today reminded New York homeowners to shop smart for home heating oil and to take the necessary steps to ensure that they get the full value for their dollar.

"As the weather gets colder, it is time to start thinking about home heating oil purchases," said Jonathan Mintz, DCA Commissioner. "Homeowners should both check for the official Department of Consumer Affairs inspection sticker on all delivery trucks and search the contract's fine print for any price-changing clauses."

Commissioner Mintz was joined by John Maniscalco, Executive Vice President of the New York Oil Heating Association. "You can't overstate how important it is to know what to look for when purchasing heating oil," said John Maniscalco, Executive Vice President of NYOHA. "The New York Oil Heating Association is working with the DCA to ensure that only reputable dealers are on the streets and homeowners are not taken advantage of. We remind our members to make sure that they get their trucks inspected by DCA so they can show homeowners their official seal."

The DCA inspects approximately 1,000 home heating oil delivery trucks annually and compliance is high at 92%. Inspections are done at the agency's test station in Brooklyn or during inspections at truck refueling terminals throughout the City. Trucks are inspected to make sure that their meters accurately register how much oil they pump; DCA then places an official seal on the back of each truck, where it is easily visible. The intact DCA seal prevents the possibility of retailers modifying their meters and shortchanging customers. DCA also checks for faulty air eliminator devices, which could cause the meter to register that more home heating oil was dispensed than the customer actually received. Meters that are inaccurate are condemned immediately. They must be repaired and retested by the DCA before being allowed to operate.

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 2, 2006 was \$2.66 per gallon, as compared to \$2.67 two weeks ago and \$2.86 the same time last year. The average price in NYC for the same week in 2004 was \$2.04 and in 2003 was \$1.59.

DCA offers the following tips to homeowners:

- **Always check the back of the delivery truck for an up-to-date official DCA seal.**
The official DCA seal certifies that the truck has been inspected and is ready to dispense fuel. If the sticker is over one year old, contact the DCA at 311.
- **Keep your receipt and check for necessary information.**
The law requires retailers to provide a receipt showing exactly how much oil

was received and how much was paid per unit of oil.

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

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

Before signing, check for any price-changing clauses such as how firmly your agreement locks you in if the prices go down, how well you are protected against price increases, other hidden costs, fees or minimum purchasing requirements that may appear in the contract. If you don't like what you see, either renegotiate or look for a different distributor.

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

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

- **Always use a reputable supplier.**

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

Energy saving tips available on the NYC Department of Housing Preservation & Development (HPD)'s Web site, www.nyc.gov/hpd, include winterizing your home, repairing broken doors and windows, checking air valves on radiators, and never using the stove as a heating source. 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. For additional information, go online to www.nyc.gov/buildings.

DCA enforces the City's Consumer Protection Law, Weights and Measures Law, and other related laws at thousands of businesses throughout New York City. Ensuring a vibrant marketplace where consumers and businesses can benefit, 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.