

Arizona Daily Star®

www.dailystar.com® www.azstarnet.com®

Published: 12.02.2006

State IDs stores to watch at checkout

By Howard Fischer

CAPITOL MEDIA SERVICES

PHOENIX — If gift shopping is in your plans, keep your eyes open when you get to the register. You could be paying too much.

New figures today from the state Department of Weights and Measures show that at 30 percent of the stores checked, more than one item in a typical 50-item basket rang up at a price higher than what was posted on the shelf.

That's even assuming there is a price on the shelf, as required by law. State inspectors said one out of every three stores had multiple items where there was no way for customers to know how much they were supposed to be charged in the first place.

Some of the worst offenders appear to be electronics stores. Four of the 10 worst companies are places where consumers would go to purchase pricey electronic gadgets: CompUSA, Best Buy, Circuit City and Fry's Electronics. Other top offenders include Pep Boys, Toys "R" Us, Home Depot and Target.

Inspectors typically pick up 50 items at a store, note the prices and bring them to the registers. Stores with more than one price overcharge fail.

At Fry's Electronics, state inspectors said stores failed eight out of 11 times. And the 25 items that rang up too high totaled out to \$286 — an average of \$11.45 too much that customers would pay.

The situation was similar at Circuit City, which failed seven out of 10 scanner-accuracy inspections. And CompUSA failed six out of nine times.

At the other extreme, inspectors said they found no items ringing up at higher-than-posted prices at Ross Dress for Less and Costco Wholesale. And neither chain failed the price-posting inspection.

Jackie Foreman, a spokeswoman for Circuit City, said she could not say why the company's stores failed so many inspections. But she said the company will work to improve compliance.

Calls to other chains were not returned.

Until 1993, state law required every product offered for sale to have a price on it. Retailers said that made no sense with the use of bar-code scanners.

Current law requires prices to be posted on or near each display, and for the price at the register to match the one on the shelf.

This year's report shows that even more stores failed to comply with that law

Overcharge safeguards

- Ways you can protect yourself from being overcharged:

I Bring newspaper ads with you so you can compare prices.

I Write down prices on items, using pens or other devices that stores are required to provide.

I Watch the display at the checkout counter to ensure the prices match what is on the shelf.

I Speak up immediately when you see scanning errors.

I Ask for the store's written policy on errors, which all are required to have; some stores give customers items that are inaccurately scanned.

I Check your receipt before you leave the store.

I Call the Department of Weights and Measures at 1-602-255-5211 or 1-800-277-6675 if an error is not fixed to your satisfaction.

Source: Arizona Department of Weights and Measures

Stores most in need of improvement

Store	Avg. price scan of items	Price posting failure*	Price Total overcharged**	Penalties
CompUSA	67%	\$9.80	73%	

than last year. The 30 percent failure rate comes even after stores get a "courtesy inspection" — one that doesn't count even if they fail and are given another chance to get it right.

Steve Meissner, spokesman for the Department of Weights and Measures, said the biggest offenders appear to be the largest stores with thousands of items where managers say it is "too difficult" to keep the posted prices and those in the cash register computers up to date.

But, Meissner said, other stores manage to comply with the law.

He said some hire people whose sole job it is to ensure that prices are correct and customers are not being overcharged. But that costs money.

"Some people might think it's cheaper to pay the fine," he said.

Those fines can add up, though. In the 12 months covered by the report, Wal-Mart paid \$210,350; Home Depot was second at \$80,650.

And where fines have not worked, the state has sued Wal-Mart and AutoZone. Attorney General Terry Goddard charged both stores with consumer fraud and seeks penalties of \$10,000 per violation — penalties he said could add up to millions of dollars for "systematic fraud against the consumers."

Both companies are fighting the lawsuit, which has yet to go to trial.

Overcharge safeguards

- Ways you can protect yourself from being overcharged:

I Bring newspaper ads with you so you can compare prices.

I Write down prices on items, using pens or other devices that stores are required to provide.

I Watch the display at the checkout counter to ensure the prices match what is on the shelf.

I Speak up immediately when you see scanning errors.

I Ask for the store's written policy on errors, which all are required to have; some stores give customers items that are inaccurately scanned.

I Check your receipt before you leave the store.

I Call the Department of Weights and Measures at 1-602-255-5211 or 1-800-277-6675 if an error is not fixed to your satisfaction.

Source: Arizona Department of Weights and Measures

Stores most in need of improvement

Price Avg. price Price Total scan of items posting civil Store failure* overcharged failure penalties**

CompUSA 67% \$9.80 73% \$10,600

Pep Boys 60% \$2.80 61% \$46,700

Best Buy 55% \$7.55 57% \$12,800

Toys "R" Us 50% \$5.34 60% \$15,450

\$10,600

Pep Boys 60% \$2.80 61% \$46,700

Best Buy 55% \$7.55 57% \$12,800

Toys "R" Us 50% \$5.34 60% \$15,450

Circuit City 70% \$6.68 78% \$5,600

Home Depot 22% \$2.00 78% \$80,650

Fry's Electronics 73% \$11.45 20% \$5,250

Target 33% \$3.63 57% \$25,200

CVS Pharmacy 55% \$1.49 32% \$4,400

Wal-Mart 30% \$3.12 57% \$210,350

Trader Joe's 40% \$1.09 43% \$800

Kmart 29% \$2.02 46% \$15,200

NAPA Auto Parts 50% \$1.02 22% \$2,700

Circle K 22% \$0.44 48% \$28,450

AutoZone 42% \$2.16 26% \$41,150

* Percentage of inspections where more than one item out of market basket rang up at price higher than posted.

** Percentage of inspections where more than 2 percent of items on shelves did not have prices posted.

Source: Arizona Department of Weights and Measures

Circuit City 70% \$6.68 78% \$5,600

Home Depot 22% \$2.00 78% \$80,650

Fry's Electronics 73% \$11.45 20% \$5,250

Target 33% \$3.63 57% \$25,200

CVS Pharmacy 55% \$1.49 32% \$4,400

Wal-Mart 30% \$3.12 57% \$210,350

Trader Joe's 40% \$1.09 43% \$800

Kmart 29% \$2.02 46% \$15,200

NAPA Auto Parts 50% \$1.02 22% \$2,700

Circle K 22% \$0.44 48% \$28,450

AutoZone 42% \$2.16 26% \$41,150

* Percentage of inspections where more than one item out of market basket rang up at price higher than posted.

** Percentage of inspections where more than 2 percent of items on shelves did not have prices posted.

Source: Arizona Department of Weights and Measures

On StarNet: Find a searchable statewide database of the state's price inspections at [azstarnet.com/special/prices](http://www.azstarnet.com/special/prices)

All content copyright © 1999-2006 AzStarNet, Arizona Daily Star and its wire services and suppliers and may not be republished without permission. All rights reserved. Any copying, redistribution, or retransmission of any of the contents of this service without the expressed written consent of Arizona Daily Star or AzStarNet is prohibited.