

Friday April 28, 2006

SA FARES WELL IN NATIONAL PRICE SCANNER AUDIT

Consumer Affairs Minister Jennifer Rankine says South Australia has fared well in a national electronic scanning audit co-ordinated by South Australia's Office of Consumer and Business Affairs (OCBA).

The Minister has today released the results of the national audit, which puts South Australia second only to Queensland in electronic scanner accuracy.

Ms Rankine says she's pleased that South Australia has fared reasonably well compared to results from other States, but some SA retailers need to do more.

"Retailers who do not manage their electronic scanning systems properly are undermining confidence and ripping off consumers at the checkout," says the Minister.

Results from the national electronic scanning audit reveal that, on average, in 80% of stores surveyed, at least one item is scanned at a price that did not match the advertised or shelf price.

OCBA is co-ordinating the national project, which includes a series of Australia-wide price scanning audits. State and Territory consumer watchdogs have so far undertaken three scanning audits.

In the 2006 audit, more than 200 stores were visited and more than 4000 individual items scanned. The stores visited included pharmacies, service stations, hardware, discount and variety stores - across metropolitan and regional areas.

The Minister says consumers should be able to feel confident that they are being charged the right price at the checkout.

"The audit results show that scanner inaccuracies have the potential to substantially undermine their confidence," she says.

"The audit highlights the high incidence of discrepancies between the advertised shelf price and the scanned price, many of which have resulted in consumers paying more than the advertised price."

The greatest over-charge amount was \$30.04 at a Northern Territory pharmacy, compared with South Australia's greatest over-charge of \$1.63 at a hardware store.

Nationally hardware, discount and variety stores showed the lowest levels of compliance. In South Australia, hardware stores were the worst offenders with just 40% of stores being 100% compliant – in other words, 60% of the hardware stores audited had at least one item scanned at a higher or lower price than the advertised shelf price.

Minister Rankine says the survey reveals South Australian hardware stores and service stations were likely to cause greater consumer detriment by overcharging customers.

Retailers subject to the audit were immediately advised of the errors and asked to rectify the situation. Follow up visits will be conducted in the near future, **and if errors are again detected OCBA will consider prosecution action.**

In the scanning audits, stores with just one incorrect price are considered non-compliant. Positively, however, of all the products scanned in South Australia, 91.4% scanned at the correct price. Queensland also showed a high level of accuracy, at 93%. Both states have standing scanning audit programs where scanned and advertised prices are monitored periodically.

Supermarkets were not a key focus for this national project, as the majority of supermarkets subscribe to a voluntary code that is supported by State, Territory and national fair-trading agencies. Under the Code of Practice for Computerised Checkout Systems, stores are required to ensure the price accuracy of their checkout systems and shelf pricing procedures.

Minister Rankine has encouraged consumers to check their dockets.

“If you find a problem, talk to the store. If you can’t resolve it there, report it to OCBA. It will take action where a store fails to take corrective action after a scanning problem has been brought to its attention. There is no excuse for a store failing to address scanning problems.”

Complaints regarding price scanning should be directed to OCBA on 8204 9777, or 131 882 for country callers.

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