



Public Information

County of Ventura • Resource Management Agency • Weights and Measures

Avoid Getting Burned On Firewood

When Buying Firewood

Whether you use it to heat your home or just to burn it occasionally in your fireplace, you should be a smart shopper when you purchase firewood.

What Is A Cord?

Firewood is generally sold by a measurement called a “cord.” A cord is equal 128 cubic feet. For example, a stack four feet wide by four feet high by eight feet long is equal to a cord.

You may also see wood advertised by a “face cord” with the length of the pieces. A 24 inch face cord is 24 inches wide by four feet high by eight feet long.

In New York, all firewood sales and advertising must include the three dimensions of the wood; that is: length, width, and height, with the wood ranked and well stowed.

Stacking A Cord For Measurement

To be sure you have a cord, stack the wood neatly by placing the wood in a line or a row, with individual pieces touching and parallel to each other, making sure that the wood is compact and has as few gaps as possible. Then measure the stack. If the width times the height times the length equals 128 cubic feet, you have a cord of firewood.

Be aware that each time you restack a pile, the dimensions will change a little because of the differing air spaces between pieces.

What About Other Claims in Advertising?

Hardwood - Hardwoods like maple, oak and cherry will provide more heat energy and burn longer than softwood species. Wood from conifers (pines), aspen, poplar, basswood, butternut, willow, and grey or paper birch may not be advertised as hardwood.

Seasoning or Drying - Seasoned or dry firewood has many benefits over green or freshly cut firewood. Dry wood greatly reduces the potential of insect pest nuisances, is easier to light, and reduces creosote build-up in chimneys. If the advertisement represents the wood as “seasoned,” the length of time and the manner of seasoning must be specified.

Get What You Pay For - Get It In Writing

When you buy firewood make sure to get a receipt! Every seller of firewood must provide a receipt for every delivery of loose firewood. The receipt must show the following:

- Name and address of the seller
- Date of sale
- Quantity and dimensions of the wood (when ranked and well stowed)
- The price

It's also a good idea to get the phone number. If you found the dealer by some advertisement, keep a copy of the ad with your receipt. If the wood is delivered, get the license number of the delivery vehicle.

Tell Tale Signs of a Rip-Off!

Reputable dealers will gladly give a receipt. If your dealer avoids giving a receipt, expect to get cheated.

You can't haul a cord of wood in a standard pickup truck. A cord is four by four by eight feet and is a lot of wood. A pickup would need to be loaded over four feet high with wood. Most standard pickups can't safely carry the weight of a full cord.

In addition, the wood is generally not ranked and well stowed when loaded on the truck. It will typically lose another 15-20% when properly stacked. This applies equally to dump trucks. Random stacking significantly increases the size of air spaces between pieces and is one of the primary ways that firewood customers are cheated.

How to Protect Yourself

When the wood is delivered, ask the seller to stack it as described above (you may have to pay extra for this service) or stack the wood yourself. Measure the wood before using any. If the cubic measurement indicates that you did not receive the correct volume, contact the seller before you burn any wood.

What To Do If You Think You've Been Short-Changed?

If the seller can't or won't correct the problem, contact your local weights and measures office before you burn any wood. It is also helpful to document the possible shortage by taking a picture of the stacked wood. Local offices can be located in the government section of your telephone directory or by writing or calling the:

800 South Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009-1750
(805) 654-2444

Visit us online at

vcrma.org/divisions/weights-and-measures