

IT'S FIREWOOD SEASON – BUYER BEWARE

The cord is the standard measurement for sale

As winter nears and the nights turn chilly, many people will choose to heat their homes with a nice, warm wood fire in the fireplace. While there are many wood dealers eager to sell at attractive prices, how do consumers know they're getting a good, fair deal? The only way to know for sure is to measure what is sold.

Firewood has its own special unit of measurement called a "cord." Firewood, in units of 1/8th of a cord and above, must be sold by the cord or fractions of a cord. A cord of wood by law must equal 128 cubic feet. To determine if there is a cord, the wood must be measured when it is "ranked and well stowed." This means the wood is stacked neatly in a row with the pieces of wood parallel and touching with as few gaps as possible. If, when measured, the width times the height, times the length equals 128 cubic feet, it is a cord of wood.

Prices per cord vary throughout the state. In Southern California, the range is from \$230-\$480 per cord; in the Bay Area, \$150-\$400; in the Central Valley, \$100-\$275.

Consumers should be wary of terms such as "pallet," "face cord," "rack," "rick," "tier," "pile," or "truck-load," as these terms are illegal to use in the sale of firewood. If a seller uses such terms, consumers should be on alert for a possible problem.

Some wood dealers try to sell firewood from a pick-up truck. Consumers should be on their guard, because a pick-up cannot hold a cord of firewood. An 8-foot truck bed can hold one-half of a cord while a 6-foot bed can barely hold one-third of a cord.

Consumers are urged to get an invoice or delivery ticket that contains the name and address of the seller, the date purchased or delivered, the quantity purchased, and the price. The seller is required by law to provide this information in writing. Consumers may also want to take note of the license plate of the delivery vehicle.

If consumers believe they have not received the quantity ordered and paid for, they may call the seller to correct the problem. Consumers should try to maintain the wood in the condition it was delivered, take a photograph, and do not burn any. If the seller can't or won't correct the problem, you should file a complaint with our county weights and measures office at (510) 268-7343.