businesscompanion
trading standards law explained

Selling petrol and diesel from forecourts

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In this guide, the words 'must' or 'must not' are used where there is a legal requirement to do (or not do) something. The word 'should' is used where there is established legal guidance or best practice that is likely to help you avoid breaking the law.

This guidance is for England, Scotland and Wales

This guide is intended for businesses that own and operate liquid fuel dispensers for the purpose of selling fuel to the general public.

How is liquid fuel measured and dispensed?

Liquid fuels (petrol and diesel) are normally dispensed through liquid flowmeters, which are known to most people as petrol pumps. These can be a single pump dispensing a single fuel, or multi-hose, dispensing a variety of fuels within the same unit. Most dispense on both sides to facilitate ease of operation for the user. Most are self-service, but some can only be dispensed by the forecourt staff.

Fuel is pumped up from underground tanks into the dispenser, which contains a metering system that counts and then relays the quantity passing through the system into the vehicle on to a display that shows the quantity dispensed in litres and fractions of a litre. For diesel, it is permitted to use overground storage tanks.

The fuel is dispensed into the vehicle via a nozzle that has a trigger operation to control the flow, and a device within it to stop the flow when the tank of the vehicle is full. It must also have a device set to allow a maximum amount per transaction, often 100 litres.

Unless the dispenser displays 'litres only', within the pump, there are calculators that convert the quantity into a price-paid display, which is based on a price setting also displayed. Most pumps are calibrated upon being put into service against volumetric measures that are set at 20 °C. However, some pumps also have a device to correct temperature to 15 °C, which must show the phrase '@ 15 deg' (or similar) beside the volume (litres) indication.

The reason for this is because the volume of all liquids changes slightly at different temperatures. Throughout the supply chain, from refinery to retail storage, the transactions are all conducted on a temperature-corrected basis; retail-to-consumer transactions at the pump are in the process of being normalised to the same. Temperature-corrected pumps must stay in this mode throughout the year so as not to favour the retailer or consumer. Retailers are free to convert from normal to temperature-corrected operation, but once they have made the transition they must stick to it; it is not permissible to change back - for example, to take advantage of seasonal ambient temperature differences.

Transactions can take place in a kiosk or shop, or 'at pump' using an accepted payment card or, in some newer models, using a mobile phone app. All dispensers must go through a zeroing process for both the litre and price indications as part of the start-up process when the operator or customer picks up the nozzle.

Pumps are regulated by law and must be of an approved type and operate within tolerances laid down in legislation (see 'Retailers' responsibilities' below). The pumps have specified data plates, which must be visible on the panelling. Newer pumps will have verification marks on panels next to the data plates, which must be maintained.

Pricing

The price charged per litre must be clearly visible to the user before they begin to dispense fuel from the pump. This can be by a separate indication on the pump, or by the price per litre being displayed during the zeroing process for multi-nozzle pumps. The first time the customer sees the price for the fuel they have chosen, they have the right to decide that they do not want the fuel at the price, and can return the nozzle to its holster before any fuel passes out of the pump; no charge may be imposed.

The site can, but does not have to, display the price of standard petrol and diesel on a roadside display board. When it does, it must display the same price as displayed and set on the pump.

Methods of payment must be made known to customers, as well as any variations in price dependent upon the method of payment. Surcharges are banned for most forms of payment used by consumers, but they can be applied for payment by, for example, commercial credit cards; for more information, see 'Payment surcharges'.

Age restriction

Petrol may only be sold to those aged 16 or over. It is essential that you ask for proof-of-age identification when potential customers appear to be too young to buy it.

It is also an offence if you allow anyone under 16 to dispense petrol.

Retailers' responsibilities

Any retailer selling liquid fuels is legally responsible for the equipment they use. This means they need to understand that in most cases the equipment they are using is part of a system, which includes the dispenser and everything else used to complete transactions with customers.

Legal requirements exist that require approval and certification of the whole system, which includes the dispenser, the control equipment, point-of-sale and peripheral devices such as ticket printers. All of these have to be not only individually approved for use, but also approved for connection to each other. The pumps and controllers themselves may be installed by one engineer and the kiosk equipment by another, so a retailer must ensure that both parties can prove that the systems are compatible. Retailers continue to be responsible for the ongoing conformity and accuracy of their equipment in normal use.

Before being placed into service, the systems have to go through verification processes and have physical testing carried out to ensure that dispensers are accurate to within their permitted tolerances and that all indications throughout the system are accurate. When that process is complete, verification marks are applied to the data plates on the pumps at that point, components within the pump are sealed using verification stamps, and then the pumps become legal for use. Older pumps are verified by having seals and stamps applied to components of the pumps such as the meter, which make them legal to use.

Following breakdowns or repairs, or if tested and found to be outside tolerances (either by service engineers or local authority Weights and Measures Inspectors), the pumps must not be used if the repairs have affected the accuracy of the pumps. The same applies in any of the following circumstances:

- The verification marks have been obliterated or a disqualification sticker has been applied (see image below), following test by an Inspector
- An engineer states that a reverification is required
- Any seals or stamps have been removed or broken



A Weights and Measures Inspector has the right to inspect and test the equipment at reasonable times. This includes removing the covers of pumps and opening the cabinet containing the displays, so keys for them must be made available on request. The right to inspect includes the retailer's duty to provide fuel to enable the test. In turn, the Inspector has the duty to return that fuel either to the storage tank, or to suitable receptacles provided by the retailer, and provide details if requested of the quantities withdrawn to enable stock control by the retailer. Some systems will record pump tests and the software in use will automatically include these in the shift or daily reports.

An Inspector may not always put a pump out of use because it is outside tolerance or has some other fault or missing information. Instead, a notice may be issued explaining what is required to be corrected, giving a time limit in which the corrections must be made. If such a notice is ignored or not completed within the time given, the Inspector has a duty to return and put the pump out of use.

Storage

The storage of fuels is subject to legislation, and the local authority for the area has Petroleum Officers appointed for the purpose. This can be the Fire Service or Trading Standards Service for the area.

Trade associations

- Petrol Retailers Association
- Renewable Transport Fuel Association (including electricity)
- Forecourt Equipment Federation (can assist with identifying equipment suppliers and engineers)
- Fuels Industry UK

Please note that a link to an organisation in the list does not imply any approval or warranty as to the standing or capability of that organisation by the Chartered Trading Standards Institute.

Other legislation

Part 4, Chapter 1 of the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024 (DMCCA) makes it an offence to give any false or misleading statements about the price charged and descriptions applied to goods. For example, claiming a particular fuel on offer conforms to a specific British Standard when it does not, or has a stated amount of biofuel content when it does not.

Please see 'Protection from unfair trading (criminal law)' for more information on the DMCCA.

Contracts between traders and consumers are also controlled by the Consumer Rights Act 2015 (CRA). The Act requires that goods and services provided by traders to consumers should be in accordance with the contract, provided with reasonable care and skill, at a reasonable price, etc. It also provides consumers with remedies they can require from the trader if goods and services provided do not meet the terms of the contract; these remedies include a reduction in the price paid.

Under the CRA, petrol and diesel supplied to consumers should be:

- Of satisfactory quality (for example, conform to British Standards or be suitable for vehicles that the retailer chooses to highlight by advertising)
- As described (for example, if it is described as being a particular brand)

See 'Selling and supplying goods' for detailed information on the CRA.

Where specific legal requirements, such as those detailed earlier in this guide, impose stricter duties and requirements on traders, they take precedence and must be complied with.

Trading Standards

For more information on the work of Trading Standards Services and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law, please see 'Trading Standards: powers, enforcement and penalties'.

In this update

No major changes.

Last reviewed / updated: October 2026

Key legislation

- Prices Act 1974
- Weights and Measures Act 1985
- Price Marking Order 1991
- Measuring Equipment (Liquid Fuel and Lubricants) Regulations 1995
- Consumer Rights Act 2015:
    - Part 1, Chapters 2 and 4
- Measuring Instruments Regulations 2016
- Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024:
    - Part 4, Chapter 1

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links go to the legislation.gov.uk website. The site usually updates the legislation to include any amendments made to it. However, this is not always the case. Information on all changes made to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

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