



# Enhancing Understanding via Frequently-Asked-Questions (FAQs)



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*For*

*FedCASIC Conference*

*March 21, 2013 | Washington, DC*

*By*

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# Disclaimer:

Opinions expressed are those of the author and do not constitute EIA policy.

# Overview

## 1. Program

- Acknowledgements
- Petroleum Marketing Data Collection
- Petroleum Marketing Products and Surveys

## 2. Applied Research on Survey Documentation

- Research on Survey Documentation
- Application of Plain Writing Act of 2010 to FAQs

## 3. Results

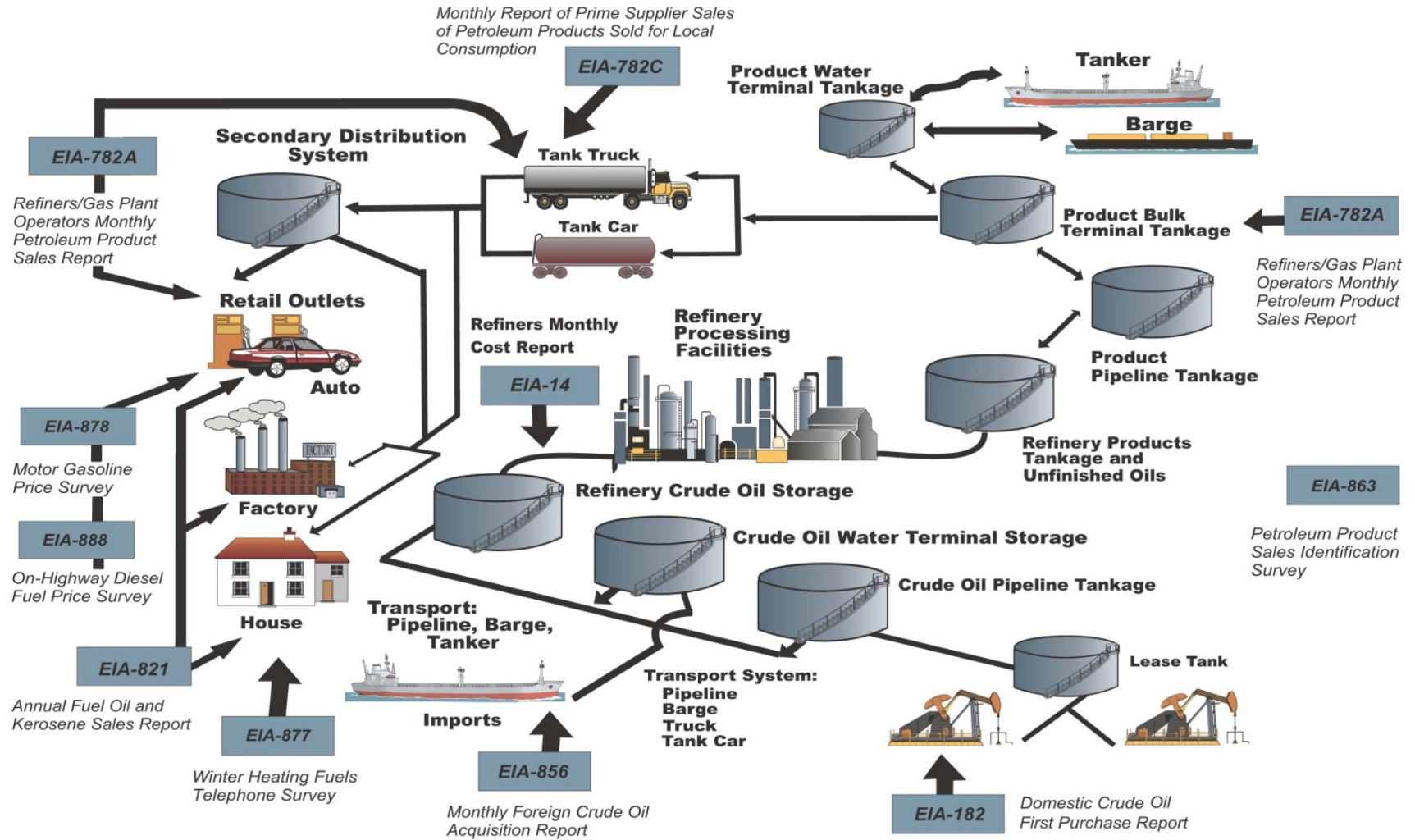
- 9 Survey Respondent FAQs
- 1 PBS Product FAQs
- Proposed FAQ Guidelines

## 4. Questions

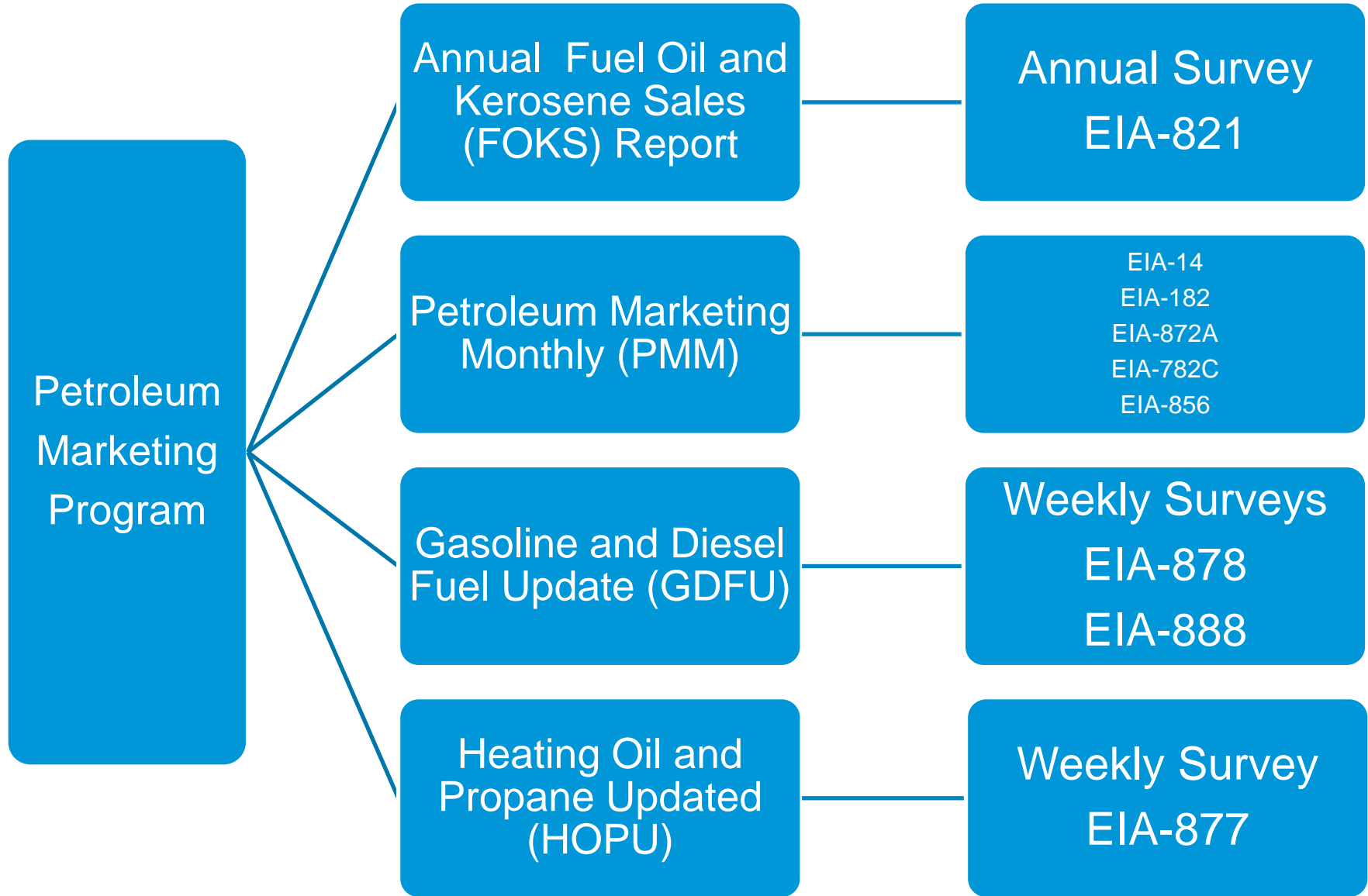
# Acknowledgements

- Doug MacIntyre, Office Director
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- Petroleum Marketing Survey Managers and Contractors
- Colleagues in the Office of Communications

# PETROLEUM MARKETING DATA COLLECTION



# Petroleum Marketing Products and Surveys



# Survey Documentation Research

## Survey Respondents

- FAQs
- Forms, instructions and attachments
- Reference guides

## Data Users

- FAQs
- Fact Sheet
- Handbooks
- Professional papers
- Technical notes in publications

# Application of the Plain Writing Act of 2010

## Purpose

- Users find what they need
- Users understand what they find
- Users use what they find to meet their needs

## Practice

- Logical organization      Anticipate & organize questions
- Word choice                      Use active voice
- Use common, everyday words
- Presentation                      Use lists and tables

## Application

PBS Frequently-Asked-Questions



# FAQs for Survey Respondents

# Organization of Survey Respondent FAQs

- **General Questions**
- **Survey-specific Questions**
- **Additional Questions**
- **Additional Information**

# General Questions

- 1. What is the purpose of this survey?**
- 2. Where can I find the published data?**
- 3. Where can I find the survey form and instructions?**
- 4. When and how can I submit data each week? month?**
- 5. What is the estimated time needed to complete this (telephone) survey?**
- 6. Do I have to report data?**

# More General Questions

- 7. What are criteria for resubmissions?**
- 8. Are my data confidential?**
- 9. What is the difference between the company address and the physical address?**
- 10. Should I inform you of a change in the contact person in our company for Form EIA-878?**
- 11. Should I inform you if our company is sold, merged with another company, or buys another company?**
- 12. What is the reference month?**

# Example of General Question

## **Q1. What is the purpose of this survey?**

The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) Form EIA-878, "Motor Gasoline Price Survey" is designed to collect data on the cash, pump price (including taxes) of self-serve, unleaded gasoline, by grade of gasoline. The data are used to calculate average gasoline prices at the national, regional, and select State and city levels across all gasoline grades and formulations. These data are point-in-time estimates as of 8:00 a.m. Monday...

## Select Survey-specific Questions

- 13. What petroleum products does EIA want me to submit data for?**
- 14. What is Residual Fuel Oil (RFO)?**
- 15. What does E10 mean?**
- 16. What is the difference between kerosene and No.1 distillate?**
- 17. How should I report sales of gasohol?**

# Example of Survey-specific Question

## **Q15. What does E10 mean?**

The “E” in E10 stands for ethanol. The “10” refers to the percent, by volume, of alcohol blended with gasoline. In other words, EXX means gasoline blended with ethanol, where XX stands for the amount of ethanol (percent by volume) is in the product. E10 should be reported on the EIA-782 surveys in the grade it was sold.

# Additional FAQs

18. [What are the differences between various types of crude oil prices?](#)
19. [How do I calculate/find diesel fuel surcharges?](#)
20. [How much tax do we pay on a gallon of gasoline and diesel fuel?](#)
21. [Why don't fuel prices change as quickly as crude oil prices?](#)
22. [Why has diesel fuel been more expensive than gasoline?](#)
23. [Does EIA have gasoline prices by city, county, or zip code?](#)



# Example of Additional FAQ

## **Q21. Why don't fuel prices change as quickly as crude oil prices?**

The cost of crude oil is a major component in the price of diesel fuel, gasoline, and heating oil. But there are other factors that affect retail fuel prices. Prices are determined by demand and supply in our market economy. Fuel demand is affected mainly by economic conditions, and for heating oil, the weather. Supplies come from refinery production, imports, and stocks (inventories.)

Suppliers price their products based on actual and expected demand relative to available and expected supplies over the short and longer term. Since stocks are the main buffer between short term demand and supply, stock levels are a major factor in fuel pricing....

Last updated: October 28, 2009

# Additional Information

## Today in Energy

- [Why have gasoline prices risen since the start of the year?](#)
- [Increases in oil prices affect broader measures of inflation](#)

## Energy Explained

- [Factors Affecting Gasoline Prices](#)
- [Price Fluctuations](#)

## Related Publications

- [Petroleum Flow \(2011\)](#)
- [Petroleum Marketing Monthly](#)
- [Petroleum Supply Monthly](#)

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http://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/taglist.cfm

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## Gasoline

FEBRUARY 25, 2013  
Why have gasoline prices risen since the start of the year?

FEBRUARY 14, 2013  
Few transportation fuels surpass the energy densities of gasoline and diesel

FEBRUARY 7, 2013  
EIA begins posting daily energy prices on Today in Energy webpage

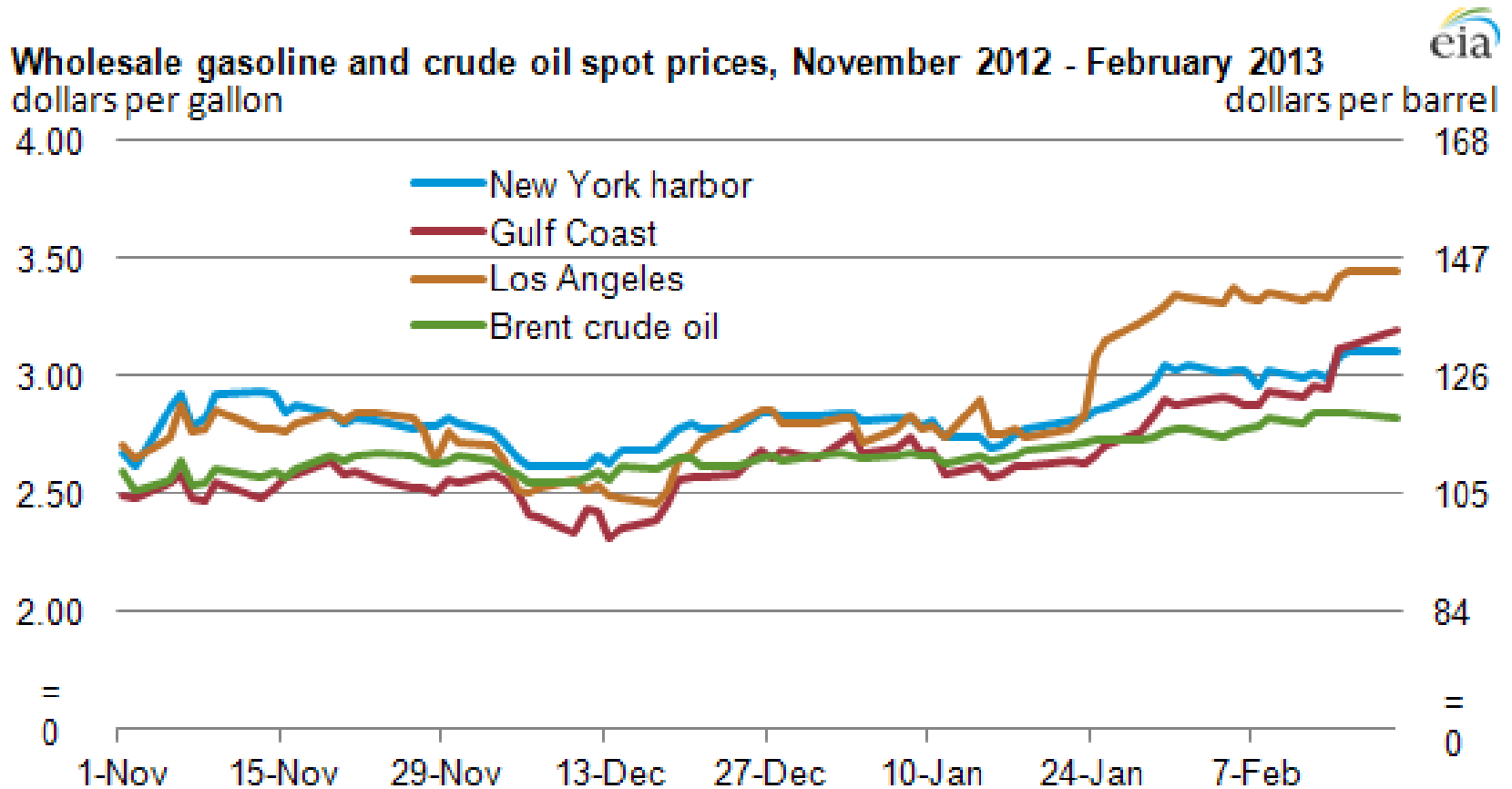
FEBRUARY 4, 2013  
U.S. household expenditures for gasoline account for nearly 4% of pretax income

FEBRUARY 1, 2013

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# Example of Today in Energy (TIE)

**Why have gasoline prices risen since the start of the year?**



# Example of Energy Explained

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the EIA website. The page title is "Gasoline Price Fluctuations - Energy Explained, Your Guide To Understanding Energy - Energy Inf - Windows Intern...". The address bar shows the URL: [http://www.eia.gov/energyexplained/index.cfm?page=gasoline\\_fluctuations](http://www.eia.gov/energyexplained/index.cfm?page=gasoline_fluctuations). The browser's menu bar includes "File", "Edit", "View", "Favorites", "Tools", and "Help". The "Favorites" bar shows "U.S. Energy Infor...", "Why have gasoline...", and "Gasoline Price Fl...". The website header features the EIA logo and "Independent Statistics & Analysis U.S. Energy Information Administration". Navigation menus include "Sources & Uses", "Topics", "Geography", "Tools", "Learn About Energy", "News", and "A-Z Index". The breadcrumb trail reads: "Home > Energy Explained > Nonrenewable Sources > Oil and Petroleum Products > Gasoline > Prices and Outlook > Price Fluctuations".

**Energy Explained — Home**

- What Is Energy?
- Units and Calculators
- U.S. Energy Facts
- Use of Energy
- Energy and the Environment
- Nonrenewable Sources**
  - Oil and Petroleum Products
    - Gasoline
      - Where Our Gasoline Comes From
      - Use of Gasoline
      - Prices and Outlook
        - Factors Affecting Gasoline Prices
        - Regional Price Differences
        - Price Fluctuations**
      - History of Gasoline
      - Gasoline & the Environment
    - Diesel Fuel
    - Heating Oil
    - Propane

**Gasoline Explained**  
**Gasoline Price Fluctuations**

Basics

Print | Email | Bookmark & Share

### Why Do Gasoline Prices Fluctuate?

Retail gasoline prices are mainly affected by crude oil prices and the level of gasoline supply relative to demand. Strong and increasing demand for gasoline and other petroleum products in the United States and the rest of the world at times places intense pressure on available supplies. Even when crude oil prices are stable, gasoline prices fluctuate due to seasonal demand and local retail station competition. Gasoline prices can change rapidly if something disrupts the supply of crude oil or if there are problems at refineries or with delivery pipelines.

### Seasonal Demand for Gasoline

Retail gasoline prices tend to gradually rise in the spring and peak in late summer when people drive more, and then drop in the winter. Good weather and vacations cause U.S. summer gasoline demand to average about 5% higher than during the rest of the year. Gasoline formulations and specifications also change seasonally. Environmental regulations require that gasoline sold in the summer be less prone to evaporate during warmer weather. This means that refiners must replace cheaper but more evaporative gasoline components with less evaporative but more expensive components. If crude oil prices do not change, gasoline prices typically

### Gasoline prices generally follow crude oil prices

**Monthly U.S. Retail Regular Gasoline and Crude Oil Prices**  
dollars per gallon (nominal)

Year	Retail Regular Gasoline* (dollars per gallon)	Crude Oil** (dollars per gallon)
1980	~1.20	~0.80
1990	~1.20	~0.80
2000	~1.50	~1.00
2008	~4.00	~3.00
2010	~3.50	~2.50

Click to enlarge >  
Download figure data >



# Example of Other Information - PMM

Petroleum Marketing Monthly (PMM) - March 2013 With Data for December 2012 - Windows Internet Explorer

http://www.eia.gov/petroleum/marketing/monthly/

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## PETROLEUM & OTHER LIQUIDS

OVERVIEW DATA ANALYSIS & PROJECTIONS GLOSSARY FAQs

ALL PETROLEUM AND OTHER LIQUIDS REPORTS

### Petroleum Marketing Monthly

Data for December 2012 | Release Date: March 1, 2013 | Next Release: April 1, 2013 | full report

Previous Issues  
Month: February 2013

**Note:** This edition includes final revisions to 2010 and 2011 monthly and annual values in Tables 1, 1A, and 18-27. See [Excel spreadsheet](#) for changes to the published data.

Monthly price and volume statistics on crude oil and petroleum products at a national, regional and state level.

**Highlights**

- Petroleum Marketing Monthly Highlights PDF
- Summary Statistics Tables** PDF
- 1 Crude Oil Prices PDF
- 1A Refiner Acquisition Cost of Crude Oil by PAD Districts PDF
- 2 U.S. Refiner Prices of Petroleum Products to End Users PDF

**Highlights**

**Figure HL1.** Crude oil and petroleum product wholesale prices dollars per gallon excluding taxes

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# FAQs for Data Users



# Publications and associated surveys

## Petroleum Marketing Monthly

- [EIA-14, Refiners' Monthly Cost Report](#)
- [EIA-182, Domestic Crude Oil First Purchase Report](#)
- [EIA-782A, Refiners'/Gas Plant Operators' Monthly Petroleum Product Sales Report](#)
- [EIA-782C, Monthly Report of Prime Supplier Sales of Petroleum Products Sold for Local Consumption](#)
- [EIA-856, Monthly Foreign Crude Oil Acquisition Report](#)

# Publications and associated surveys (continued)

## Weekly

- **Gasoline and Diesel Fuel Update**
  - EIA-878, Motor Gasoline Price Survey
  - EIA-888, On-Highway Diesel Fuel Price Survey
- **Heating Oil and Propane Update**
  - EIA-877, Winter Heating Fuels Telephone Survey

## Annual

- **Fuel Oil and Kerosene Sales**
  - EIA-821, Annual Fuel Oil and Kerosene Sales Report

# Page Views and Visitors for PBS Publication

<b>Gasoline and Diesel Fuel Update</b>	<b>309,836</b>	<b>121,938</b>
Weekly Petroleum Status Report	108,788	49,393
This Week In Petroleum	48,601	24,567
Petroleum Supply Monthly	43,046	14,583
Heating Oil and Propane Update	20,845	12,368
Petroleum Marketing Monthly	8,938	3,845
Refinery Capacity Report	7,506	2,799
Petroleum Supply Annual, Volume 1	6,436	3,143
Company Level Imports	6,318	4,137
U.S. Crude Oil, Natural Gas, & NG Liquids Reserves	5,315	3,755

# Gasoline and Diesel Fuel Update

Gasoline and Diesel Fuel Update - Energy Information Administration - Windows Internet Explorer

http://www.eia.gov/petroleum/gasdiesel/

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### Gasoline and Diesel Fuel Update

Gasoline Release Date: March 11, 2013 | Next Release Date: March 18, 2013  
 Diesel Fuel Release Date: March 11, 2013 | Next Release Date: March 18, 2013

**U.S. Regular Gasoline Prices\* (dollars per gallon)** [full history](#)

	02/25/13	03/04/13	03/11/13	Change from	
				week ago	year ago
U.S.	3.784	3.759	3.710	↓ -0.049	↓ -0.119
East Coast (PADD1)	3.799	3.762	3.726	↓ -0.036	↓ -0.046
New England (PADD1A)	3.817	3.798	3.772	↓ -0.026	↓ -0.037
Central Atlantic (PADD1B)	3.806	3.774	3.746	↓ -0.028	↓ -0.047
Lower Atlantic (PADD1C)	3.788	3.743	3.696	↓ -0.047	↓ -0.050
Midwest (PADD2)	3.735	3.709	3.618	↓ -0.091	↓ -0.191
Gulf Coast (PADD3)	3.624	3.576	3.542	↓ -0.034	↓ -0.105
Rocky Mountain (PADD4)	3.471	3.476	3.469	↓ -0.007	↓ -0.010
West Coast (PADD5)	4.053	4.069	4.049	↓ -0.020	↓ -0.169
West Coast less California	3.780	3.824	3.835	↑ 0.011	↓ -0.111

[+] See more

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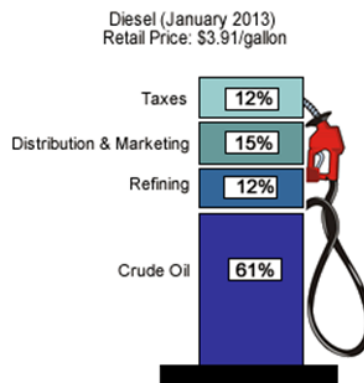
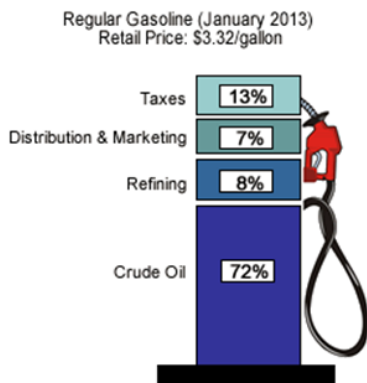
### Regular Gasoline Prices

(dollars per gallon)

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\*prices include all taxes

What we pay for in a gallon of:



Source: Energy Information Administration

Details...

Procedures, Methodology & CV's

- [Gasoline](#)
- [Diesel fuel](#)

Geographical

- Gasoline:
- [Gasoline prices by region](#)
  - [Reformulated gasoline map](#)
  - [Map of states in each region](#)
  - [Gasoline city definitions](#)

- Diesel Fuel:
- [Map of states in each region](#)

Other

- [Pump methodology and data history](#)
- [Federal & State Motor Fuels Taxes](#)

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↳ GASOLINE AND DIESEL FUEL UPDATE HOME

## Gasoline and Diesel Fuel Update

Gasoline Release Date: March 11, 2013 | Next Release Date: March 18, 2013  
 Diesel Fuel Release Date: March 11, 2013 | Next Release Date: March 18, 2013

### Learn more...

#### Price trends and regional differences

**What causes fluctuations in motor gasoline prices?**  
 Retail gasoline prices are mainly affected by crude oil prices and the level of gasoline supply relative to demand. Strong and increasing demand for gasoline and other petroleum products in the United States and the rest of the world at times places intense pressure on available supplies. Even when crude oil prices are stable... [read more in Gasoline Explained](#)

**What causes fluctuations in diesel fuel oil prices?**  
 The retail price of a gallon of diesel fuel reflects the underlying costs and profits (or losses) of producing and delivering the product to customers. The price of diesel at the pump reflects the costs and profits of the entire production and distribution chain, including... [read more in Diesel Fuel Explained](#)

**Why are gasoline prices higher in some regions than in others?**  
 Although price levels vary over time, average retail gasoline prices are often highest in certain States or regions. Besides taxes,

**Details...**

**Procedures, Methodology & CV's**

- [Gasoline](#)
- [Diesel fuel](#)

**Geographical**

Gasoline:

- [Gasoline prices by region](#)
- [Reformulated gasoline map](#)
- [Map of states in each region](#)
- [Gasoline city definitions](#)

Diesel Fuel:

- [Map of states in each region](#)

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# Structure of FAQs for GDFU

- **Price Trends and Regional Differences**
- **Price Components**
- **Measuring Prices**
- **Alternative Options for Motor Gasoline and Diesel Data Files**
- **Data Quality and Survey Methodology**



# Price Trends and Regional Differences

1. **What causes fluctuations in motor gasoline prices?**
2. **What causes fluctuations in diesel fuel oil prices?**
3. **Why are gasoline prices higher in some regions than in others?**

## Related FAQs

4. [Does EIA have gasoline prices by city, county, or zip code?](#)
5. [How can I find historical gasoline prices for each state?](#)
6. [What was the highest U.S. average retail price of regular gasoline?](#)
7. [What's up \(and down\) with gasoline prices?](#)



## Example of Price Trends and Regional Differences

### **Q6. What was the highest U.S. average retail price of regular gasoline?**

According to EIA's weekly survey, the U.S. average retail price of regular gasoline reached \$4.11 per gallon on July 7, 2008. On an inflation-adjusted basis (expressed in real 2012 dollars using the Consumer Price Index) the highest monthly average price was \$4.29 per gallon in June 2008.

Learn more:

- [Weekly on-highway gasoline and diesel prices](#)
- [Real Petroleum Prices](#)

Last updated: September 7, 2012

# Price Components

8. **What are components of retail price of diesel fuel?**
9. **What are fuel surcharges?**

## Related FAQs

10. [How much tax do we pay on a gallon of gasoline and diesel fuel?](#)
11. [What do I pay for in a gallon of regular gasoline?](#)
12. [How do I calculate/find diesel fuel surcharges?](#)
13. [How many gallons of motor gasoline and diesel fuel does one barrel of oil make?](#)

# Example of Price Components

## Q11. What do I pay for in a gallon of regular gasoline?

The national average retail price of a gallon of regular gasoline in January 2013 was \$3.32. The four main components of the retail price of a gallon of gasoline, and their approximate share of the total price in January were:

**Crude Oil: 72%.** The cost of crude oil as a share of the retail price varies over time and among regions of the country. Refiners paid an average of about \$100.00 per barrel of crude oil, or about \$2.39 per gallon, in January 2013.

**Refining Costs and Profits: 8%**

**Distribution, Marketing, and Retail Costs and Profits: 7%**

**Taxes: 13%.** Federal excise taxes were 18.4 cents per gallon and state excise taxes averaged 23.44 cents per gallon....

# Measuring Prices

**14. Where can I find real motor gasoline and on-highway diesel prices?**

Related FAQ's

**15. [Why has diesel fuel been more expensive than gasoline?](#)**

**16. [Where can I find prices for "off-road" diesel fuel?](#)**

# Example of Measuring Prices

## Q16. Where can I find prices for off-road diesel fuel?

EIA does not publish prices specifically for "off-road," "non-road," or "off-highway" diesel fuel.

Off-road diesel fuel is sold for use in vehicles and equipment that are not usually operated on public roadways, such as those used on farms and railways, in construction, and for electric power generation. It is not subject to the State and Federal excise taxes that are applied to retail sales of diesel fuel sold for use in vehicles generally operating on public roadways. It is dyed red (as is heating oil) to distinguish it from on-highway diesel fuel.

A way to roughly estimate off-road diesel fuel prices would be to use the [weekly retail on-highway diesel fuel prices](#) and subtract [Federal and State excise taxes](#).

[On-highway diesel fuel](#) now being sold at retail is ultra-low sulfur diesel.

Last updated: February 2, 2012

# Alternative Options for Accessing Motor Gasoline and Diesel Data

## **Q17. Are the data available in Excel format?**

Yes, find links titled "full history" on the top right of the each table on the [main page](#). The same links are provided below:

See [historical motor gasoline prices spreadsheet](#)

See [historical diesel fuel prices spreadsheet](#)

## **Q18. What is the release schedule?**

The prices are published around 5:00 p.m. Monday (Eastern time), except on government holidays, when the data are released on Tuesday (but still represent Monday's price). See [holiday schedule](#).

# Alternative Options for Motor Gasoline and Diesel Data Files

**Q19. How can I register to receive weekly gasoline and diesel fuel oil data?**

[Sign-up](#) for the email notification list.

**Q20. What are procedures for reuse of EIA data and graphs?**

U.S. Government publications are in the public domain and are not subject to copyright protection. You may use and/or distribute any of our data, files, databases, reports... [read more in Copyrights and Reuse policy](#)

# Data Quality and Survey Methodology

- 21. What are the motor gasoline price data collection methods?**
- 22. What are the diesel fuel oil price data collection methods?**
- 23. What are motor gasoline sampling and estimation procedures?**
- 24. What are diesel fuel oil sampling and estimation procedures?**
- 25. How reliable are the motor gasoline and diesel fuel oil prices?**



# Example of Data Quality and Survey Methodology

## Procedures, Methodology, and Coefficients of Variation

- **Gasoline Price Data Collection Procedures**

Every Monday, retail prices for all three grades of gasoline are collected by telephone from a sample of approximately 800 retail gasoline outlets. The prices are published around 5:00 p.m. ET Monday, except on government holidays, when the data are released on Tuesday (but still represent Monday's price). The reported price includes all taxes and is the pump price paid by a consumer as of 8:00 A.M. Monday. This price represents the self-serve price except in areas having only full-serve....

# FAQs Guidelines



# Proposed FAQ Guidelines

- 1. Understand the intended use of a particular Q&A before you start writing.**
- 2. Critical thinking is essential when writing a good FAQ.**
- 3. Recycle questions.**
- 4. Define acronyms, terms, and units of measure.**
- 5. Provide clues on navigation and content for audience.**
- 6. Encourage use of hypertext links to help users navigate.**
- 7. Use agency format to post FAQs for consist look-and-feel on the website.**

# What's Next?

- 1. Finalize FAQs for surveys in Petroleum Marketing Program**
- 2. Finalize FAQs for products in PMP**
- 3. Use Google Analytics to Evaluate Usage**
- 4. Finalize FAQ Guidelines**
- 5. Agency decision to adopt Guidelines**

# Discussion Questions

- 1. How do you organize FAQs for respondents and data users?**
- 2. What FAQs do you ask respondents? Data users?**
- 3. What are useful design features for FAQs?**
- 4. How else can we help respondents and data users to navigate website with FAQs?**
- 5. Is it useful/possible to have consistent set of FAQs for respondents?**
- 6. Is it useful/possible to have consistent set of FAQs for data users?**
- 7. Any other questions or suggestions for guidance for FAQs?**

# For more information

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