



NEWS RELEASE

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Shopping the commissary – it’s all about saving

*By Millie Slamin,
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FORT LEE, Va. – Have you ever made a quick stop at a local supercenter to “pick up a few things” only to look in bewilderment from your purchase to the register receipt and realize you would have saved more had you purchased these items at the commissary?

Then you wonder, “How is it that I save so much more at the commissary?”

“As the provider of the military’s most valued nonpay benefit, DeCA is mandated by the Department of Defense to ensure commissary patrons receive no less than 30 percent savings when they shop the commissary,” said Defense Commissary Agency Director and CEO Philip E. Sakowitz Jr., “so our customers are guaranteed to save at least that much.

“That’s a huge savings in today’s market – and that percentage increases when customers use coupons in conjunction with their purchases,” he continued. “That’s a savings that would be hard to pass up!”

Although 30 percent is impressive, the latest calculations by the agency’s sales directorate put customer savings, worldwide, at 31.1 percent.

“To arrive at this figure, we conducted a comprehensive price comparison study,” said Randall Chandler, DeCA director of sales. “We compared prices at commissaries throughout the continental United States, overseas, and in stores in Alaska and Hawaii with prices at supermarkets, major grocery chains and supercenters in the same respective areas.”

According to Chandler, the process used to calculate the totals differs somewhat from one region to another, depending upon the geographical location. The total percentage of savings

from each region is combined to determine the total percentage commissary customers save, worldwide.

“For instance, to arrive at the total percentage of savings for the continental United States, grocery prices are compared using an industry database,” Chandler continued. “We take the prices of more than 30,000 items sold at our commissaries and compare them to the same items sold at supermarket prices from that geographical area.

“We then factor in the price of fresh meat and produce from 30 commissaries and compare it with two local outside retail markets, using an on-site audit. Grocery items, meats and produce sold at commissaries are totaled, and the surcharge is added, and this total is then compared to the total of the same items sold at retail stores, adding the state sales tax,” he said.

Because the industry database does not have outside retail prices for Alaska, Hawaii and overseas, an on-site audit is conducted in those regions to compare the price of up to 200 grocery items, fresh meats and produce items. To arrive at the worldwide total, overall sales from all regions are combined to arrive at the worldwide percentage total. The resultant percentage is used in determining the cost-of-living allowance for military personnel.

In addition to its study to determine the percentage of customer savings worldwide, DeCA uses Department of Agriculture figures for retail grocery food purchases consumed at home to calculate how much a service member and a family unit saves yearly.

To calculate the dollar amount, they take the 31.1 percent savings and apply it to the U.S. Department of Agriculture results for food expenditures for family units.

“We do this to give our shoppers an appreciation for how much they can save with consistent commissary shopping,” said Chandler. “For instance, we determined that the estimated yearly savings for a family of four is \$3,400, more than \$2,600 for a family of three, more than \$2,100 for a couple and nearly \$1,200 for a single service member or retiree.”

The 5-percent surcharge that is added to the bill, unlike a sales tax, comes back to customers in the way of new commissaries, improvements to existing stores and state-of-the-art equipment to enhance quality and service for DeCA customers worldwide.

“In today’s slumping economy, it is paramount that we stay committed to bringing increased savings to our customers,” said Sakowitz. “And, with savings at 31.1 percent, shopping the commissary is definitely worth the trip!”

- DeCA-

About DeCA: *The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of*

commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families in a safe and secure shopping environment. Authorized patrons purchase items at cost plus a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. Shoppers save an average of more than 30 percent on their purchases compared to commercial prices – savings worth about \$3,400 annually for a family of four. A core military family support element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America's military and their families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.