

Fuming Over Fossil Fuel? Knock a Quarter off the Top

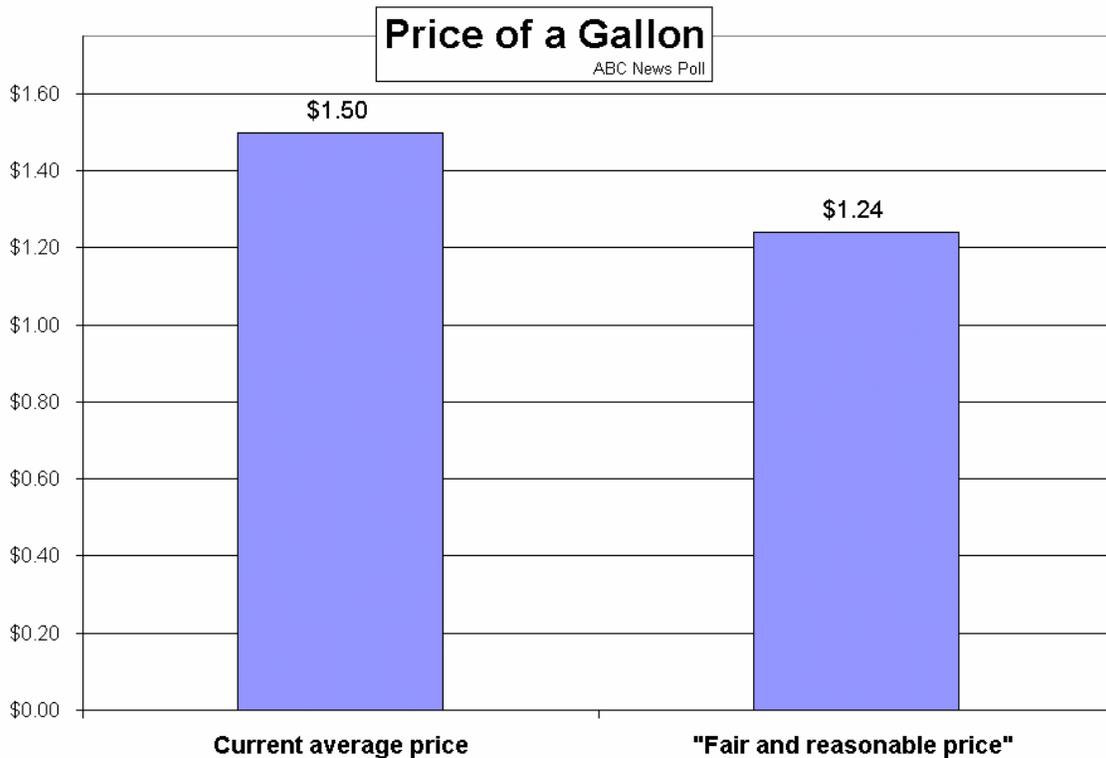
As Americans head to the road this Memorial Day weekend, there'd be an easy way to make 'em happy: Just lop 25 cents off the price of a gallon of gas.

Not likely, perhaps, but Americans in an ABC News survey say on average that \$1.24 is a fair and reasonable price for a gallon of unleaded regular gasoline. The current average price, unfortunately, is \$1.50, according to the latest U.S. Department of Energy report.

It's been moving in the right direction: Gas prices hit a high of \$1.73 in mid-March, thanks to Iraq war jitters, and have been declining since. But they haven't been at the public's perceived "fair and reasonable" level since March 2002.

The most consistent differences are regional – not a surprise, since there are big regional differences in gasoline prices. Gas is most expensive in the West – peaking at \$1.81 a gallon in California – and Westerners on average say \$1.31 sounds fair. In the South, where gas prices are lower – around \$1.38 – the fair and reasonable average is \$1.17.

	All	West	East	Midwest	South
"Fair and reasonable price" for a gallon of gas	\$1.24	\$1.31	\$1.27	\$1.25	\$1.17



Naturally there's a range around the average. Fifty-three percent of Americans pick a number between \$1.00 and \$1.50 per gallon as fair. For 27 percent it's \$1 or less; for 13 percent, \$1.50 or more. (Seven percent have no opinion.) In the West, 29 percent pick a price over \$1.50; that drops to single digits in the South and Midwest.

The average perceived fair price is about the same among only those Americans who drive – \$1.23 – mainly because so many Americans, 91 percent, drive a car.

Barring a steep plunge in gasoline prices, the quickest path toward a perceived fair price for Californians might be for them to move – from San Francisco, for example (\$1.89 a gallon, according to the Department of Energy) to, perhaps, Houston (\$1.36). But the drive won't be cheap: In an SUV getting the standard 20.7 miles per gallon, figure \$142 for fuel on the trip.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News poll was conducted by telephone May 14-18, 2003, among a random national sample of 1,036 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:
<http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>

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Results follow. * = less than 0.5 percent.

1. Do you happen to drive a car, or not?

	Yes	No	No opin.
5/18/03	91	10	0

2. What do you personally think is a fair and reasonable price for a gallon of regular unleaded gasoline?

	Average	\$1 or less	Between \$1 and \$1.50	\$1.50 or more	No opin.
5/18/03	\$1.24	27%	53	13	7

END