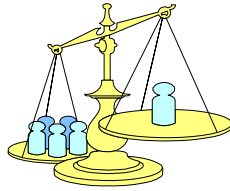


SPOTLIGHT ON WEIGHTS & MEASURES

SONOMA COUNTY SEALER OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES



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LEGAL METROLOGY

Do you ever wonder how U.S. companies manage to trade or sell goods with international companies that exclusively use the "Metric System". In the U.S. the British "inch-pound" system has been traditionally used, and has caused some difficulties. For example, a U.S. company sells 100 U.S. tons (224,000 pounds) of steel to a British company who deals in metric tons and pays in British pounds. Conversions have to be made at some point and recognized standards have to be applied. One U. S. ton can of course be converted to a metric ton, pounds, or to kilograms, but who is in charge of determining how the kilogram and the U.S. pound are related?

Trading groups and trading nations ran into this problem early in the development of trade. Eventually they agreed amongst themselves of a need to establish a simple and uniform system of "standards" to be used and adhered to by all parties involved. Today we have the "Treaty of the Meter", the intent of the treaty is to set and maintain "standards" for the purpose of fair and accurate trade among participating nations.

This agreement gave birth to what we now refer to as the "System International" (SI system) or the metric system.

International standards for distance, volume, weight, temperature, and electric current are kept and identified at the International Bureau of Weights and Measures near Paris, France (BIPM). You can learn more at the following web site: <http://www.bipm.fr/en/home/>

Today the international standard for weight in the metric system is based on the kilogram. The kilogram is now defined as the exact mass of the "standard kilogram", which is made out of platinum-iridium. All other weight measurements in the metric system are based on this kilogram. Copies of the original kilogram are kept by the "standards agencies" at all of the major industrial nations and it is used as a standard within those nations. One kilogram is equal to 2.205 pounds. Our measuring system of the pound, the mile, and the gallon are now defined by these international standards.

So where does your local Weights and Measures Office come into play among all these international agreements and standards? Local weights and measures enforcement is the responsibility of your County Weights and Measures Office. It is also our job to check, among other things, your local supermarket scale in order to determine that the pound of shrimp being sold to you at \$4.99 a pound is actually a standard pound.

LEGAL METROLOGY (CONT)

The division's inspectors accomplish scale checks by inspecting the weighing devices and by using "testing standards" that can be traced back to the international standards in France. The consumer is assured that one pound sold in Sonoma County is the same weight as a pound sold in Orange County.

Inspectors also check packaged commodities for net content labeling requirements. Packaged goods need to be labeled with the appropriate units, metric and standard, as well as being true to their labeled quantities. This is all done in the interest of guarding against consumers being over charged. A pound should weigh a pound no matter where you are (unless your talking British currency of course).

CONSUMER COMPLAINTS

In the month of September we reviewed eight complaints. They are as follows:

Three complaints were for service stations and two of those were related to possible problems with the dispenser. The third one was a complaint about possible water contamination. All three complaints were thoroughly investigated and were found to be unsubstantiated at the time of the inspection.

Two complaints were related to mobile home park issues. One complaint was related to a possible bad water meter installed at the mobile home park. This meter was pulled from the field and tested in the lab and was found to be within tolerance. The meter's start and end readings were investigated and found to be in order. The other complaint dealt with the California Alternate Rates for Energy (CARE) discount that qualifying applicants get on their utility bills. The complainant was referred to PG&E to apply for the CARE discount program. If you would like more information on the CARE program, go to the following link http://www.pge.com/res/financial_assistance/care/

Another complaint dealt with candies not having prices posted. This complaint was not substantiated and the candy in question was marked and charged at the correct price.

The remaining two complaints dealt with vehicle scales. One scale was tested and found to be within allowable tolerances. The other complaint was made by a customer who thought he was charged for more weight than what was actually on the scale. The vehicle scale was tested because the driver, wanting to sell their product, thought the weigh tag he received had a discrepancy. This scale was also tested and found to be within allowable tolerances. However because the scale was located on a high hill, the wind gusts did affect the scale when the occasional strong gust of wind would blow across or under the platform. If the scale attendant was not careful, an incorrect scale reading could potentially be recorded. This was pointed out to the attending personnel and they intended to call the scale company to figure out if they could do something about the scales sensitivity to the wind gusts.

WEIGHTS & MEASURES HUMOR

12 boos = 1 picaboo

2,000 mockingbirds = 2 kilomockingbirds

10 millipedes = 1 centipede

1,000 whales = 1 kilowhale

A **milliHelen** is the amount of beauty required to launch one ship.

A **microHelen** is the amount of beauty required to motivate one sailor to even think about venturing anywhere near water.