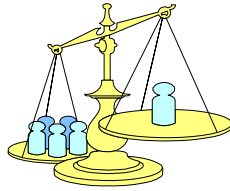


SPOTLIGHT ON WEIGHTS & MEASURES

SONOMA COUNTY SEALER OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES



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Complaints

Twelve consumer complaints were received in October. Nine were for measuring devices and the other three were for quantity control or pricing issues.

Of the nine measuring device complaints five were related to service stations and the accuracy of the fuel dispenser. The other four complaints concerned the condition of the dispenser and the quality of the fuel.

One complaint involved a burned out LCD (liquid crystal display) on the dispenser. The LCD did not allow the customer to see what volume was pumped or what was being charged at the time of sale. Three of the station's dispenser LCDs were partially burned out and were promptly "red-tagged" and placed out of service.

We were unable to substantiate the remaining service station complaints. These complaints were filed by consumers who felt as though they were victimized by inaccurate fuel dispensers. The complainants felt more fuel was dispensed than their tank should hold. If you recall, the past month was one of extraordinary fuel costs. Paying \$40.00 for a fill-up seemed commonplace. Many people are accustomed to paying a price within a reasonable range. When that range is exceeded, they presume an error with the meter.

One complaint involved the suspicion of possible water contamination in the service station fuel. We were not able to verify the validity of the complaint at the station and a sample of fuel was sent to the state lab. The state lab confirmed that the sample was free of contaminants.

Another complaint received involved a retail water dispenser that was under delivering water to customers by 13 percent. This water dispenser was recently certified by one of our area inspectors who found no problems at the time of the yearly inspection. Upon following up on the customer's complaint, the dispenser was found to have lost calibration. An attentive consumer who noticed that it was costing him more money to fill his 5-gallon water jug pointed this out to us. The consumer routinely filled the container using the same device at this store, and suspected an error. This dispenser was immediately placed out of service and the business was warned about the situation and their responsibility in maintaining an accurate device.



Other measuring device complaints involved two mobile home parks and the possibility of overcharges on the monthly utility service bill. When a mobile home resident suspects being overcharged on monthly utility services our inspectors attempt to narrow down all possible causes. First the inspector tests the device in question in order to determine if the measuring device is faulty. If this does not resolve the issue, the inspector then audits the customer's monthly bills in order to determine if the correct rate was charged. If computations are correct then there could be a possibility that a miss read occurred on the part of the meter reader. This happens on occasion if the park's agent is not careful when reading or noting the opening and closing reading of a tenant's electric, gas or water meter. The state of California requires that mobile home parks or their billing agents clearly identify the opening and closing readings of a utility device on a tenant's utility bill.

There were three complaints related to our "Quantity Control" or QC program. One of the complaints involved a firewood purchase of three cords of oak wood for nearly a thousand dollars. Upon measuring the delivered amount, our inspectors determined that there was a shortage of just less than 18.5 percent for a total monetary value of \$176. The wood dealer was contacted and informed of the finding. In this particular case the wood dealer admitted that there may have been a mistake and was given a written "Notice of Violation" by the inspector for delivering "less than the represented and charged amount". The business in question voluntarily and promptly delivered the missing quantity and explained that the delivery driver who had two orders to deliver made the mix up. Again an alert consumer knew enough about firewood to be suspicious and ask for assistance. The savings amounted to \$176 for that citizen. More than that, the dealer was alerted to be careful to deliver the invoiced amount to each customer, and that we are here to verify any delivery.

To refresh everyone's memory, a cord of wood is 128 cubic feet of wood neatly stowed (not cross stacked), which, generally speaking, is a stack of wood in the shape of a rectangle that measures 4 feet by 4 feet by 8 feet in length. Keep this in mind next time you pay close to \$300 for a pile of wood that is dumped on your front driveway.

Sonoma County Harvest Fair

Our division participated in several judging events at the Harvest Fair, but the one that gets the most attention by far is the Giant Pumpkin Contest. This year's winner weighed in at 1,087 pounds and took home a \$1,000 prize. Second place was not far behind weighing in at 951 pounds. For more information and pictures you can visit the Sonoma County Fair's web page at: http://www.harvestfair.org/press_release.php?pk_id=88. Come by and see us next year at the Giant Pumpkin Contest and you too can see a pumpkin the size of a Volkswagen.



Happy Thanksgiving