

# SPOTLIGHT ON WEIGHTS & MEASURES

## SONOMA COUNTY SEALER OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES



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### COMPLAINTS

April was a moderate month for consumer complaints. Our division received the following complaints:

- Service Stations 5
- Firewood 1
- Quantity Control 1

As we all have come to realize with a sting, fuel prices are above the three-dollar range and they appear to be hovering there for the foreseeable future. Typically the division receives an increase in consumer complaints when the price of fuel increases. We received five complaints this past month against service stations. All of these complaints were generated by consumers who felt that the dispenser used to purchase fuel was “overcharging” or “under delivering” the amount of fuel bought.

Our inspectors investigated all five complaints and were unsuccessful in replicating what the complainant felt they had experienced. One of our main functions as an investigative division is to serve as a third party mediator and represent both the interest of the consumer as well as the business, so the market becomes a fair and equitable place for commerce. When a complaint against a service station is investigated, every precaution is taken to replicate the conditions of the complaint’s purchase. Dispensers are checked for hose leaks, electrical interference, mechanical malfunctions, and labeling requirements. Additionally, the fuel is checked for contamination or low octane quality if the nature of the complaint warrants it.

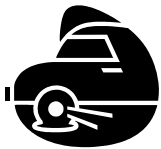
The firewood complaint was against a “wood dealer” who advertised his wood as “seasoned”. The consumer was delivered an amount she felt was “wet” and far from seasoned. The inspector had to determine what promises the firewood dealer made to the general public and whether it was reasonable to expect the firewood dealer to keep all of his wood dry given the recent rains. Current industry practice recognizes “seasoned” firewood as wood, which has been cut and laid out in the open to dry for a year. Wood that is seasoned may be wet and still be considered “seasoned”. In this particular instance the wood quality was in good condition and did not exhibit any mold or rotted condition do to excessive moisture.

The “quantity control” complaint revolved around a decorative rock sale. A consumer was quoted a certain amount of rock would cover an “approximate amount” of square feet. The complainant felt that he was slightly misled because he covered far fewer square feet than what the business had estimated the pallet of decorative rock would cover. He felt he was either “shorted” in the quantity he was delivered or the business estimate of stone coverage was “misleading”.

The consumer was also upset at the business’ return policy for the pallet that holds all of the decorative rock. Some business would not blink an eye at charging you for the weight of the palette even though it is not part of the product weight. This is illegal because it would be considered a “gross sale”. This is a long-standing problem that starts at the wholesalers. Currently the State of California is trying to tackle this particular

issue. Some rock businesses allow for a weight deduction to be taken off of the total purchase in order to compensate for the weight of the pallet. Whether it is the correct weight is another story.

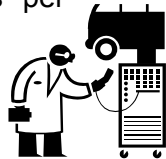
The inspector handling the case inspected the scale used to make the sale and found it to be undercharging in the consumer's favor. He further educated the business on posting a clearly defined "return policy" for the pallets involved in the sale. It was determined that the business did have a posted sign that clearly indicated that the square feet indicated was in fact an "estimate" and not a definite coverage of square feet for the particular rock sold.



### CONSUMER TIP

Here are some tips to help you save some money on your fuel costs:

- If you have two vehicles, drive the one that gets the best miles per gallon



- Get a tune up

- Combine errands into a single trip rather than making multiple excursions

- Make sure air filters are clean and tires are properly inflated



- Drive gently – Aggressive driving including speeding, rapid acceleration and braking wastes fuel (it can lower your fuel mileage by 33 percent at highway speeds and by 5 percent around town); sensible driving is also safer for you and others, so you may save more than fuel costs
- Walk, bike, carpool, or take mass transit – walking and biking have a double benefit, you can save money and become healthier
- Using cruise control on the highway helps you maintain a constant speed and, in most cases, will save fuel

- Pack light when traveling – extra weight in the trunk can reduce fuel economy
- Idling gets 0 miles per gallon – vehicles with larger engines typically waste more fuel at an idle than do vehicles with smaller engines
- When you use overdrive gearing, your vehicle's engine speed goes down – this saves fuel and reduces engine wear.



You can find all these tips and more advice at the United States Department of Energy's official website at:

<http://www.fueleconomy.gov/>

### W. & M. HUMOR

- 2,000 pounds of Chinese soup?  
= won ton
- 1,000 cubic centimeters of wet socks?  
= 1 literhosen
- 1,000 aches?  
= 1 kilohurtz
- Time it takes to sail 220 yards at 1 nautical mile per hour?  
= knot-furlong

