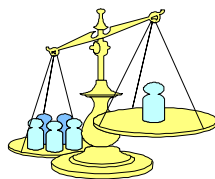


SPOTLIGHT ON WEIGHTS & MEASURES

SONOMA COUNTY SEALER OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES



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Editor C.R. Caporale

COMPLAINTS

We received 13 complaints in June and July.

Of the 13 complaints, 5 were quantity control complaints.

QUANTITY CONTROL

The first complaint was that a newly opened electronics store did not have stock on hand of a number of items being advertised. An investigation revealed that customers were given a "rain check" for items that were not on hand but could be delivered within 1 day from the store's warehouse. While the customer may have been inconvenienced by the lack of specific merchandise, the store was at greater risk due to the potential loss of customers.

Another complaint was that tax and California Redemption Value (CRV) were overcharged on a can of beer at a convenience store. The customer was not given a receipt. Undercover purchases were made on beer and other items that were also overcharged. The investigation continues.

A complaint was made that the sticker price on a large flowerpot at a hardware and garden store was greater than the shelf sale price. The sales clerk entered the incorrect price on the cash register. The error had been corrected by the time the inspector arrived.

Another complaint was that a hardware store did not have posted price per linear foot signs on redwood lumber. The labeling was corrected.

Our office and the District Attorney's office are investigating a consumer complaint against a major chain store regarding misleading "buy one-get one free" advertising. Normally, you would purchase two of the exact item and the price of the second one would be deducted. Hence, the second one would be "free". However, if the first "buy one-get one free" item costs \$3.69 and the second item costs \$2.79, the lower price of the two items is deducted from BOTH items. In other words, the \$2.79 is deducted from the \$3.69 item also. The chain seems to have made corrections as the last few inspections showed no problems.

DEVICES

There were 730 devices tested. Devices consist of gasoline pumps, scales, gas and electric meters, taxi meters, timing, and other measuring or weighing devices.

Three electric meter complaints were registered, and one was confirmed. A mobile home park resident thought the bill was unreasonably high. The meter was found to be out of tolerance.

One vapor meter was brought to the office by a mobile home park in response to a resident's complaint. The meter was found to be within tolerance. The meter was run on our test bench attached to a master meter and quantities of compressed air is pushed through it at full and 10% of capacity rates. Each meter is also immersed in a water basin to test for leaks.

There were four complaints about incorrect gas

pumps. Three of those complaints were that the pumps dispensed more gasoline than the vehicle's tank size. The fourth complaint was that the indicator jumped to \$.03 before pumping began. The pumps were checked and all were found to be operating correctly. Occasionally, when a pump jumps there is a leak in the vapor recovery nozzle that forces gas back to the vapor recovery system. When the pump is turned on, gas fills the air space left by the vapor leak so the pump jumps a few cents.

MISCELLANEOUS

Staff members conducted our annual crane scale testing at the Sonoma County Road Maintenance Yard in Healdsburg on July 26th and August 2nd. Wineries and vineyard management companies brought in over 50 crane scales for certification.

STAFF

Congratulations! Standards Specialist Fernando Vasquez passed his state license exam on measuring devices.

DID YOU KNOW?

What is a "Balancier"? The California Division of Measurement Standards identifies the profession "Balancier" as a French term for beam maker. A beam is the oldest form of a scale. Why is this important? The owner of a scale business is running for public office and listed his profession as "Balancier". The Registrar of Voters called to ask if this is a true profession.

CONSUMER TIPS

If you have a consumer complaint, these are some things you should remember:

- Save your receipt.
- If a sale price listed in the newspaper is not honored, keep the advertisement.
- If you report a discrepancy to a business, write down the person's name and a brief description of that person.
- If the complaint is regarding a gas station, note the station's location, the pump number, and the grade of gasoline.

- Report the complaint immediately.
- Be specific – it's difficult for inspectors to respond effectively to a complaint that "it happens all the time" or "they are always ripping people off".

CONSUMER CORNER

- Q.** "The regular price of an item I wanted to buy was \$3.99. The sale price read "two for \$5.00". I didn't want two. Do I have to pay the regular \$3.99 price?"
- A.** No, you should only be charged \$2.50 for one item unless the sign specifically says that you must purchase two and then the \$3.99 price would apply for one.
- Q.** "I pumped 2.5 gallons of propane into a propane canister. When I got to the register, I was charged \$10.00. The clerk told me there was a minimum \$10.00 charge. Is that legal?"
- A.** Yes, it is legal to charge a minimum. However, this minimum charge must be posted at the dispenser in clear view.