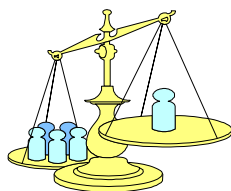


SPOTLIGHT ON WEIGHTS & MEASURES

SONOMA COUNTY SEALER OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES



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CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations are in order for Standards Specialist, Fernando Vasquez, for passing his Class A driver's test. He can now drive the heavy capacity truck that is necessary for checking the accuracy of large scales. Also in line for congratulations is Jeff Yparraguirre who passed license exams for both Weight Verification and Measurement verification.

COMPLAINTS

Twenty-four complaints were received in July. Nine of the complaints registered were against gas stations. Most were that the pump was overcharging. None were substantiated. Two of the complaints were that the advertised price was lower than the price on the dispenser. The two stations were in the process of changing prices at the time the customer arrived. They lowered the advertised price, then became busy and failed to change the price at the dispensers. The customer purchased gas and was charged the higher price. When the inspectors arrived at the station, the dispenser prices had been changed. The attendant admitted that the station had become busy and changing the dispenser price was delayed. He was told that the dispenser prices should be lowered first, then the advertised price. This way the customer would receive the benefit of the lower price. If the price increased, the opposite

should be done. The price advertised should be changed first, and then the dispenser price.

Violations of these procedures may result in a Notice of Violation being issued if, at the time the inspectors reach the station, the advertised price is lower than the dispenser price and the customer is overcharged.

DEVICES

The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors approved the following fee increases for Commercial Device Registration, beginning July 1, 2003:

<u>Number of Devices</u>	<u>Fee</u>
1 to 3	\$40
Taxi Meter	\$40 per taxi
LPG Meter	\$40 per location
Vehicle Meter	\$40 per meter

The Board also approved increases for non-commercial testing.

Each year, before grape harvest time, two days are scheduled to test crane scales at a central location. Notification of the time and location is sent to crane scale owners. This year, twenty-nine crane scales were tested. This is a cost saving measure for Weights and Measures and allows for a greater number of scales to be tested in a much shorter time period.

(continued)

DEVICES (cont.)

The inspectors also tested 12 dormant scales, 16 portable platform and ten vehicle scales in July. Many of these devices are also used during the grape harvest.

QUANTITY CONTROL

The department received 13 quantity control complaints. Many of the complaints received were a result of the Press Democrat article regarding a case against Safeway involving Sonoma, Marin and Shasta counties. The article talked about the Weights and Measures investigation of 2-for-1 mix and match offers at the market. The investigation disclosed that when the customer purchased "buy one get one free" breakfast cereal they were not receiving the correct savings. The \$2 million settlement was split between Sonoma, Marin and Shasta counties.

The article spurred many calls to the office complaining about various markets in the area. Most of the complaints were unsubstantiated. However, a couple of the complaints were valid.

One complaint was against a small discount store. The customer was overcharged on candy. The candy was not a sale item. The shelf price was lower than the price that scanned. The manager said the price had increased, but the store had failed to change the shelf price. A Notice of Violation was issued. The inspector found three different candy brands that were scanning incorrectly.

The other valid complaint was that a grocery store advertised beer in their newspaper ad at a certain price and the beer scanned at a higher price. The customer purchased the beer twice during the sale and the beer scanned incorrectly both times. The store corrected the problem by the time the inspector checked the items. The market said the advertisement was incorrect because the picture in the advertisement was not the brand on sale.

WEIGHMASTER

A Weighmaster workshop was held in July for county Weighmasters. The training covered laws and regulations pertaining to Weighmaster responsibilities. The training also covered training Weighmaster deputies, requirements for certificates, the proper way to fill out certificates, worksheets and record keeping, and establishing and maintaining tare weights. The county has held this workshop for several years and it has been very successful.

CONSUMER CORNER

Q: Is the Weights and Measures Department on the Internet?

A. The Weights and Measures Department is a division of the Agricultural Commissioners Office. The Weights and Measures Department can be found at www.sonoma-county.org. Look for the Agricultural Commissioners Department. Weights and Measures will be found under the Agricultural Commissioners site. Many consumer tips are there!

CONSUMER TIP

Always try to save your receipt. This seems very basic but it is a very important reminder. However, if you believe you were charged incorrectly, it will benefit you when making a complaint. We receive many complaints where the complainant no longer has the receipt or threw it away. It is important to have in order to get an adjustment on your bill. Just last month we received a complaint on an overcharge that was corrected in the register by the time we arrived on the scene. A receipt was the only evidence that the complaint was valid.