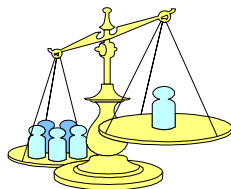


# SPOTLIGHT ON WEIGHTS & MEASURES

## SONOMA COUNTY SEALER OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES



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### NATIONAL WEIGHTS & MEASURES WEEK

California Department of Food and Agriculture Secretary A.G. Kawamura joined agricultural and standards officials across the country in recognizing the week of March 1-7 as National Weights & Measures Week.

California Department of Food and Agriculture's Division of Weights & Measures works with California's 58 agricultural commissioners to ensure that customers get what they pay for.

"The people who work in our weights & measures program are unsung heroes," said Secretary Kawamura. They ensure accuracy of measurement for everything from produce in the market to fuel at the gas station.

With over \$495 billion in goods and services traded over decades regulated by the Division of Weights & Measures in California, a one-percent shift in accuracy computes to \$4.95 billion of additional costs to California consumers. This protection is a bargain costing a mere 55 cents per person per year. Consumers pay more for a single grapefruit than for an entire year of weights & measures protection.

In Sonoma County, the Board of Supervisors recognized the positive contributions of the Weights and Measures Division with a Gold Resolution. Chief Deputy Mark Hanson introduced the staff to the Board commenting

that the responsibilities are fun to carryout; we visit a wide variety of businesses establishing a balance between buyers and sellers. The eight member staff has a combined 180 years of service to weights and measures.

### COMPLAINTS

We received a record number of complaints for the month of February, which had an extra day, being a leap year. There were 14 complaints, 9 device, 2 petroleum 1 Weighmaster, and 2 quantity control.

### DEVICES

There were 2 electric meter complaints about increases in electric bills. The meters were tested and found to be accurate. On the same vein, 2 gas meters were checked for excessive usage but were found to be correct.

Three service station pumps were thought to be incorrect but found within tolerance

A person complained that a taximeter was unsealed and over-charging. The cab was located and that meter had been checked two months prior, was found to have the security seal intact. We received a number of complaints about a propane company that sent bills two to three years late. The company additionally serves Marin County, which had complaints filed there also. A combined investigation by Sonoma

## DEVICES CONTINUED

and Marin counties was unable to resolve the billing procedure because weights and measures had no laws regulating the time a bill could be sent. Violations in the content of the bills were found, which we do have jurisdiction over. When a bill is issued it must contain the readings of the meter, the net total of the product sold, and the unit price, the unit description (cubic ft. or gal), the date the meter was read, and separate from the total usage, any other charges like a rental or surcharge.

## PETROLEUM

A complaint about a station that was being remodeled that didn't have any price signs was checked out: we found that the station hadn't even opened yet.

Another complaint was a price sign that was different from the pump price. When an inspector visited the station to investigate, the discrepancy had already been corrected.

A complaint of gasoline being contaminated by diesel fuel was investigated. The complainant, a diesel mechanic, claimed to be able to tell what was wrong with the fuel. A sample was taken within an hour of the complaint being filed. The state petroleum lab in Los Angeles tested the sample; the results proved the sample was unadulterated gasoline. The inspector noted at the time the sample was taken that the pump was a dual grade, the gasoline nozzle on the right and the diesel nozzle on the left. It seems probable that the complainant used the left-hand nozzle.

## QUANTITY CONTROL

The first complaint was that a small food store had charged for more photocopies than were made. An inspector made a number of undercover copies and was asked by the store employee how many copies were made, since the counter on the copy machine was broken. No problem was found.

In a second complaint, a customer called in about salami that was on sale for \$3.49 and was charged \$3.99. The store had two areas that had the Salami

and they forgot to take one of the sale signs down from one display. They removed the sign, but were still issued a Notice of Violation.

## CONSUMER CORNER

Q. Do door-to-door sellers have to deduct tare weights for packaging material like grocery stores do?

A. Yes, all products must have the tare deducted from the usable product. Also, the price per pound and the net weight must be stated.

Beware of door-to-door meat or fish sales. Some door-to-door salesmen have been coming to neighborhoods in Sonoma County and selling meat without weight statements. You could be paying many times more for the product than you would at a store and the quality might be inferior. The latest people selling door-to-door operate out of white trucks with refrigeration units in the bed. Beware.

## CONSUMER TIP

When purchasing items on the Internet from grocery or other stores the same rules apply as if you were purchasing it in person directly from the store. They must have the price of the item, the price per unit or weight if applicable and any additional information that would be available in the store.

