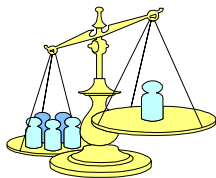


SPOTLIGHT ON WEIGHTS & MEASURES

SONOMA COUNTY SEALER OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES



John Westoby
Agricultural Commissioner/Sealer
133 Aviation Blvd, Ste 110,
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

Mark Hanson
Chief Deputy Sealer
Phone (707) 565-2548
Fax (707) 565-3850

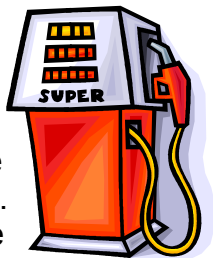
http://www.Sonoma-county.org/agcomm/weights_measures

July 2004

Editor D. Keller

DEVICES

We received six gasoline dispenser complaints that suspected the inaccuracy of the measurements. Only one of the complaints received was verified. The nozzle was found defective causing the meter to register after the complainant had stopped pumping. A Notice of Violation was issued to the Station Manager and the Manager was warned to keep up the maintenance on his dispensers.



Sonoma County Weights and Measures just installed a new undercover gasoline tank in one of our vehicles. The tank holds 13 gallons of gasoline. This will enable us to investigate complaints of inaccuracy in the purchase of gasoline. It is common to receive complaints from consumers that they put more gasoline into their tank than it's capacity, as stated in the owner's manual. When we investigate these complaints we follow several steps: Inspectors check the shop manuals, County Fleet Operations, or with dealers to see if the complainants' model car has optional sized fuel tanks. These sizes can be ten percent or more larger than listed in the owner's manual. The inspectors then test the dispenser in question for accuracy, correct computation, vapor recovery malfunction, and remote readout agreement. In addition to these tests, if the inspector suspects there still may have been a problem or if there are multiple complaints at this location, an

undercover purchase of gasoline will be performed. The new undercover tank enables the inspector to purchase the gasoline as a regular customer and compare the delivery of the gasoline with the known capacity in the holding tank. This method has been used in many counties and the State Division, and found to be very effective in discovering any unethical operations at a gas station.



Several complaints came in regarding the accuracy of electric meters. None of the meters were found inaccurate, however, when investigating one of the complaints the inspector found the problem had been in the reading of the meter. Errors in reading electric and gas meters are often a problem. Utility meters commonly have clock-face registers that are easily mis-read. Some dials travel clockwise while the adjacent one travels in the opposite direction. It is recommended that managers read meters from the right to the left to note where to round-down and avoid inaccuracies.

Beginning the new fiscal year, Weights and Measures has entered into a joint powers agreement with other counties in sharing our heavy capacity weight truck and the weight mover. In addition to renewing our agreement

DEVICES CONTINUED

with Napa County, Marin County has joined the agreement and will be sharing their smaller weight truck with us. This will benefit the counties in the rush to complete the winery scales during the crush season. Also the three counties will be sharing a petroleum truck that will enable the inspectors to inspect gasoline stations more efficiently. Sonoma County will now have access to this \$40,000 petroleum truck for as little as just the maintenance costs in using the truck.

QUANTITY CONTROL



There were approximately 713 packages inspected in June for net weight accuracy. Only 11 packages were found in less quantity than represented. This amounts to 98 percent of the packages being labeled correctly in June. When a prepackage audit is done in a store, a random sample of each lot of meat, cheese, or bread is selected and weighed using the sealed Sonoma County computing scale for accuracy. A "lot" is a group of packages defined by a combination of brand, type, code date, location, and other factors that define it. If a package is found short weight the inspector checks more of that same lot to see if there is a consistency in that lot of short weight product. If the lot is short weight, it is pulled from the counter to be relabeled by the store and then released for sale or sent back to the packer if packed outside that particular location. The inspector looks for a 98% compliance to pass the audit, however, if there is a pattern that results in a great amount of consumer harm the inspector will issue a Notice of Violation for the one lot. If there is more than a

2% failure in the audit a Notice of Violation is issued to the company and the inspector does a Package Inspection Report for each suspected short weight lot. These reports are legal documents issued to the company, which are reported to State Measurement Standards and are the basis for civil penalties that can be levied on the company for the short weight products.

CONSUMER TIPS

Don't wait to report a problem at a gas station if you think you have had a problem and suspect the dispenser is inaccurate or the fuel contaminated. Time is of the utmost importance. Gasoline stations receive deliveries almost every day and one delivery after your purchase changes the dynamics of the complaint and will effect the outcome. The quicker the inspector can get there to obtain the sample or test the dispenser the better it is to correctly evaluate the situation.

CONSUMER CORNER

Sonoma County Division of Weights and Measures has a great website for consumers to get answers to frequently asked questions regarding the division and the laws and regulations that are enforced by Weights and Measures. The website is <http://www.sonoma-county.org/agcomm/weights/weights/index.htm>