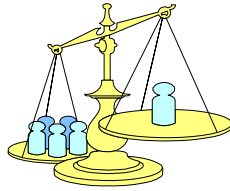


SPOTLIGHT ON WEIGHTS & MEASURES

SONOMA COUNTY SEALER OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES



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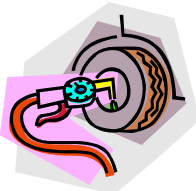
Free Air and Water At Service Stations

Five years ago the Legislature added a requirement that service stations provide free air and water services. Our office has screened several complaints that the service is not being provided. There are some conditions that allow for deviation from the notion that the services are provided or are “free”.

Air and water must be provided “free” only to fuel customers. That is, you must purchase gasoline or diesel to qualify for the “free” service. Purchase of a drink or newspaper from the mini-mart does not qualify.

Some stations may not offer these services, because of repeated acts of vandalism. Stations are allowed to discontinue the service if the air and water dispensers are damaged. The condition to discontinue service is three vandalism reports must be on file with the local police or sheriff’s department.

Every location, not exempt due to vandalism, must keep the units in good working order and post a sign with a phone number for customers to report out-of-order conditions. The number is 1-800-356-7057.



Testing for Petroleum Contamination

Our office inspects every underground fuel storage tank for water contamination. The test uses a water sensitive paste applied to the end of a 10-foot “dip measure”. The measure is graduated in inches and the paste is applied to the bottom 3 inches. The measure is lowered to the bottom of the tank and removed. If water has settled out of the fuel to the bottom of the tank the green or yellow paste will react and turn pink. Any amount above 1-inch results in a directive to have the water pumped from the tank.

Another sampling tool is called a “thief”. This is a clear tube with a one-way valve on the bottom. As it makes contact with the bottom of the tank, the valve is pushed open and a sample of fuel is drawn into the bottom of the tube. When the thief is raised from the bottom, the valve closes and a true sample from the bottom of the tank is retrieved. A visual inspection can determine the presence of water, sediment, or particles.

In addition to tank sampling, a smear of the same paste is applied to test measures and funnels so water-contaminated fuel coming through the nozzle will be detected.

Testing for Petroleum Contamination (cont.)

Our office will also test for fuel contamination, because one fuel can be contaminated with other fuels. Diesel in gasoline will cause loss of power. This contamination can happen at the refinery, or if the tank on the delivery truck was not purged before changing from diesel to gasoline. Gasoline in diesel will cause pre-ignition and rough performance. Distilling the fuel, boiling it in a closed recovery apparatus, will disclose whether the product is contaminated. The Weights and Measures Office has the apparatus, but the state lab is used for the final determination.

With the elimination of the additive MBTE and the substitution of ethyl alcohol, the test method for detecting water contamination is changing. Alcohol holds water in suspension, so the current detection method may not detect smaller amounts until they have had time to settle to the bottom of the tank due to gravity and cooler temperatures. The Division of Measurement Standards is developing improved detection methods that we will soon implement. Until that time, we are confident that we are able to detect water contamination in all but the most rare cases. As usual, any suspect samples are sent to the state lab for precise analysis.



What Are Tare Weights?

A tare weight is usually packaging material surrounding a commodity. It can be a bag, box, wrapper, and/or container. For example, on retail meat packages the tare is the foam boat, shrink-wrap, label and soaker, and any un-edible addition, such as a coupon, wrapper

for sauce or spices (but not the sauce or spices), skewer for a shish kebab, or decoration. Tare for cheese include any un-edible rind or wax coating, whether packed or weighed at time of sale.

What about other commodities? When weighing wholesale lots of wine grapes or apples, the bin or box that holds the fruit is the tare. In the fishing industry, tare is the bin and ice that holds the fish. For landscape materials, the box or pallet that hold decorative stone is tare. For quarry products, tare is the weight of the truck.

Tare weights must be subtracted from gross weighing because every commodity is sold on a net weight basis. Only the usable product must be charged to the customer.

Tare weights can be determined at time of sale or established beforehand. A truck tare is established when the unloaded truck is first weighed on a vehicle scale. The truck must be at it's heaviest; full fuel tanks and accessories in place.

Because of the nature of the quarry business, the driver's weight can be included in the tare weight provided the driver never leaves the truck during any weighing that day. Boxes, bins, and pallets of similar construction and used by a single company can have their tares determined by a common weighing. That weight must be labeled on the container and the weight maintained within two percent. A Common Tare Certificate must be filed with the State Division for those weights to be used commercially.

Weighing each container separately, and permanently marking the tare on the box, bin, pallet, or tank determine tares for individual containers. When no predetermined tare is used, the tare material must be weighed at time of sale.

Consumer Tip

Can propane sellers charge for a “minimum fill?” Yes, it is legal to charge a flat rate or “minimum charge” for quantities less than five gallons. This is an old provision of the Code from the time metering of propane was unreliable. A container of known capacity could be filled for any unmeasured amount up to five gallons. This allows remote locations to sell needed fuel without the expense of a meter and also allowed the vendor to recoup some of their cost of labor. These exemptions expanded the number of locations where propane was available. Now most sales are metered, but the provision for a five gallon minimum charge equivalent remains.



Happy Father's Day