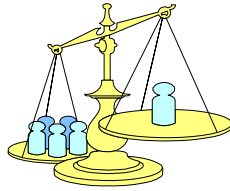


SPOTLIGHT ON WEIGHTS & MEASURES

SONOMA COUNTY SEALER OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES



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HARVEST SEASON

As a Sonoma County resident, you may have noticed the increased activity that occurs this time of the year in the wineries and vineyards.

The grape harvest is an economic, logistic, and group event that involves a large number of businesses and individuals that purchase and sell grapes from and to each other. Last year, the total economic value of the wine grape production in Sonoma County was estimated to be over \$300 million dollars.

How does this involve the Weights and Measures Division? The majority of these wine grapes are weighed to determine monetary values as well as production values for estimating production amounts.

This weighing process is done over scales that range from vehicle scales for weighing loaded trucks, crane scales for weighing gondolas off of the trucks, and platform scales for weighing individual crates and bins. Each type of scale has to be inspected and certified by our office to determine that they are accurate, being maintained, and are in good working condition. These types of scales are designed to weigh large capacity weight in the thousands of pounds. They are inspected on a yearly basis in order to determine that all transactions are being carried out in a manner fair to all parties involved.

COMPLAINTS

We received two interesting complaints in July 2005.

One complaint was against a rental truck business. The complainant rented and drove a moving truck from Montana to California and believed that he was overcharged for mileage. The complainant felt that he was being overcharged based on a faulty hub odometer. The rental agreement allowed for a certain amount of mileage to be put on the truck from a direct drive from Montana to California. The odometer read nearly a hundred miles over the allowable lease agreement and the customer was charged accordingly. Our division responded and tested the truck in question and drove it several miles with test equipment attached to it allowing us to verify the accuracy of the odometer. We determined that the vehicle odometer was within allowable tolerances. The interested parties were notified about the results and no enforcement action was taken against the rental truck company.

We also received a complaint from an individual who rented a refuse box from a local disposal company. He requested a thirty cubic yard box and believes that he was given a twenty cubic yard box.

COMPLAINTS (CONT.)

The local recycle company has several boxes in several dimensions and the box in question is identified by an equipment number, which is currently being used by another customer. The box is being traced down and our division will respond as soon as it is emptied. We will measure the internal dimensions, which will determine whether it is in fact a thirty cubic foot box and if there was any misrepresentation of its true capacity.

CONSUMER CORNER

Since the majority of us drive on a daily basis, we frequently visit service stations. Here are some things to be aware of as a patron of service stations.

Not all service station dispensers are placed in identical positions. The State of California does not require a specific orientation of fuel dispensers as long as the service stations clearly identify and comply with all mandated labeling requirements. You may notice that at some service stations the "87" octane product may be in the middle, while at other service stations the "87" octane may be on the far left or on the far right of the dispenser.

Each service station is required to provide "free" air and water for "fuel" paying customers who patronize their establishment. Some air and water machines do require a coin for operation. If you purchased fuel and you require the use of the air compressor or radiator water for your vehicle, the service station is obligated by state law to provide you with free air and water.

Dispenser nozzles are required to have an "auto" shut-off valve that shuts off the dispensing of fuel when the tip of the nozzle is submerged. Do not attempt to continue filling the vehicle's tank, this could result in fuel being

spilled and possibly sprayed back in the direction of the user as the back-pressure on the nozzle boot increases. If the nozzle shuts off but you continue to dispense fuel and get sprayed in the process, it is not because of a faulty design but "incorrect" use of the device. This practice is called "topping off" and is discouraged for safety reasons. Nozzles will not adequately shut off if they are used in an upside down position, as they are not designed to be used in this fashion.

Your vehicle's owner's manual has an "estimated" gallon capacity. This indicated capacity is not calibrated, exact, or absolute. Most vehicles can be filled past this stated tank capacity because of the excess space in the fill pipe. Most vehicle manufactures also want to keep the vehicles' fuel pump submerged in fuel in order to avoid drying out of the pump and its components. In order to do this, the manufactures will allow reserve fuel to remain in the tank above its stated fuel capacity. If you run your vehicle nearly empty and then re-fuel to capacity, you may in fact find that you are able to pump in more fuel than what your owner's manual states.

