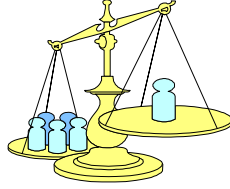


SPOTLIGHT ON WEIGHTS & MEASURES

SONOMA COUNTY SEALER OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES



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CERTIFIED APPLICATOR WORKSHOP

In November of 2005 we had a total of 13 complaints. They break down in the following categories:

- Service Stations 4 complaints
- Scanner/QC 7 complaints
- Weighmaster 1 complaint
- Mobile Home 1 complaint

Of the four service station complaints, three of them were related to a suspicion of faulty meters that were not delivering accurately. All three complaints were investigated and the inspectors were unable to replicate the nature of the complaints and the meters were certified as being within permissible tolerances. The fourth complaint was related to the suspicion of contaminated fuel at a local service station. The inspector took a sample and sent the sample to be analyzed by the State's petroleum lab. The sample results came back clean and no action was taken against the service station in question.

Our Scanner and Quality Control (QC) program investigated seven complaints related to price discrepancies at retail level. The complaints ranged from confusing sale signs posted at the merchandise locations to confusing receipts given to customers at the point of sale.

No major actions were taken on these complaints but it did provide our inspectors an opportunity to educate the customers and retailers about what is permissible under the State's consumer laws.

One complaint was made against a business that the complainant thought was violating the State's Weighmaster Program laws. The issue involved a "weigh-tag" that the customer felt had been altered. The business in question is located in a neighboring county and so the State Weights and Measures inspectors were asked to look in to the situation. No resolution has been reached up to this point. A "weigh-tag" is short for "Weighmaster Certificate", a legally binding document that can only be issued by a licensed weighmaster. Certificates are the basis of payment because they document the quantity of the bulk commodity.

The last complaint centered on an electric meter located at a mobile home park. The tenants concern was that the streetlight was being wired and being charged to his electric meter without his consent. When our investigators arrived to check the electric meter and the wiring of the streetlight they found that the landlord had changed some things to accommodate the tenants' complaints.

COMPLAINTS (CONT.)

The inspectors determined that the electric meter was performing within allowable tolerances. They could not determine one way or another if the streetlight had been wired through the tenant's electric meter because some electrical work had recently been completed. The streetlight was not found wired through the tenant's electric meter on the day of the inspection and the inspectors were unable to take any action regarding the tenants' suspicions.

CONSUMER TIPS

Holiday Shopping: Is a Sale Price Your Best Deal?

Holiday sale ads: They blanket the airwaves, jam your mailbox, and add another pound to your Sunday paper. Soon you'll be bombarded with ads for pre-holiday sales, preferred customer specials, early bird sales, midnight madness events, coupon savings days, and, don't forget, post-holiday sales. Sure you want a good deal, but just how do you decide if the deal is real? The Federal Trade Commission offers some tips to help you get the most for your money.

Shop around. A "sale" price isn't always the "best" price. Some merchants may offer the sale price on the item you want for a limited time; other merchants may discount the item you want everyday. Also, when you're comparison-shopping, make sure you have: the item's manufacturer, model number, stock number or other identifying information.

Read sale ads carefully. Some may say "quantities limited," "no rain checks," or "not available at all stores." Before you step out the door, call ahead to make sure the merchant has the item you want in stock. If you're shopping for a popular or hard-to-find item, ask the merchant if he'd be willing to hold the item until you can get to the store.

Take time and travel costs into consideration. If an item is on sale, but it's all the way across town, how much are you really saving once you factor in your time and the costs of transportation and parking?

Look for price-matching policies. Some merchants will match, or even beat, their competitors' prices. Read the merchant's pricing policy carefully. It may not apply to all items.

Go online. Check out Internet sites that compare prices for items offered online. Some sites also may compare prices offered at stores in your area. If you decide to buy online, keep shipping costs and delivery time in mind.

Carefully consider bargain offers that are based on purchases of additional merchandise. For example, "buy one, get one free" or "free gift with purchase." If you don't really want or need the item, it's not a deal.

Ask about sale adjustments. That is, if you buy an item at regular price and it goes on sale the next week, can you get a credit or refund for the discounted amount. What documentation will you need?

Ask about refund and return policies for sale items. Merchants may have different refund and return policies for sale items, especially clearance merchandise.

