

SPOTLIGHT ON WEIGHTS & MEASURES

SONOMA COUNTY SEALER OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES



Lisa Correia
Agricultural Commissioner/Sealer
133 Aviation Blvd., Ste. 110, Santa Rosa, CA 95403
http://www.Sonoma-county.org/agcomm/weights_measures

Mark Hanson
Chief Deputy Sealer
Phone (707) 565-2371

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Editor Fernando Vasquez

COMPLAINTS



Eight consumer complaints were reported in January 2006. Two of those complaints were related to service stations.

One of the service station complaints concerned the quality of fuel that a service station was selling to the public after the recent rainfalls and floods. The complainant's vehicle ended up in the repair shop soon after he purchased fuel at this local service station. The complainant thought that after the heavy rainfall, the station in question might have suffered some water contamination to their storage tanks.

A Weights & Measures inspector was immediately dispatched to the service station to investigate. The inspector noticed that half of the station was "inoperable" because of water damage to electrical components that had been exposed to water.

The inspector first checked the storage tanks for water contamination and found none. He then took a fuel sample from the dispenser used by the complainant and shipped that sample to the State lab for analysis. The results indicated no traceable amounts of water or other contaminants were present

Our regulations are to prevent external contaminants entering into the fuel. State Water and Air Quality agencies also regulate service stations' underground



storage tanks. Stations are required to prevent the escape of fuel in the form of vapor and/or liquid from their storage tanks by maintaining a sealed unit, which prevent the escape of fuel or vapors.

Upon concluding this investigation, it was determined that the sealed storage tank managed to keep out the floodwaters and prevented the contamination of the stored fuel.

Another interesting complaint was registered with our Quantity Control Program. It revolved around the possible practice of short changing customers who sold their recyclable products at a local recycler. The original complainant specified he was shorted on the weight of his aluminum cans by about 10 percent.

The inspector handling this complaint collected some aluminum cans and weighed them to get a "redeemable" weight. The cans were brought to the specific recycler where the attendant paid the inspector as if he were a customer. The inspector was given a short weight underpayment on his can sale.

The next day a second inspector tested the scale to verify its accuracy and determined that it was within tolerance. Passing the tests eliminated the scale as the source of the weight discrepancies.

On a second test sale, a different inspector presented a pre-weighed amount of aluminum cans to the attendant and was also given a

short weight, which calculated to about 12 percent under weight. The second undercover sale of recyclables confirmed that a specific attendant was taking advantage of customers by under registering the weight total of the cans being redeemed.



The inspector handling the complaint is taking enforcement action to remedy the situation.

Another interesting but unfortunately typical complaint was filed with our "Price Verification" program. The complaint revolved around an overcharge of \$35 dollars at a local electronics store. The customer was not given the sale price for the purchase of a product that was on sale.

As a consumer, if you assume that computers are flawless and are always correct, keep in mind that the sale information in the computer is all entered by human beings who are fallible.

CONSUMER TIP



Do you recycle cans and plastic bottles as you do your part to conserve our resources?



If you don't, keep in mind that every time you purchase a recyclable product such as a 12 pack of soda, you are charged what is called a California Redemption Value (CRV) added on top of the product price. Not all products are recyclable and of course some are more valuable than others. The consumer has the option of returning that container to a local recycler in order to redeem the CRV. In California, the Division of Recycling under the Department of Conservation regulates the recycling industry. They set the redemption rates for recyclable products and they also regulate all the independent recyclers throughout the State.

Unfortunately they only have about ten inspectors for the entire State. Your local Weights & Measures office has the authority to check the commercial scales used at the local

recyclers. As well as following up on any complaints that consumers may have regarding the misrepresentation of the purchase of recyclable items.

As a "green" consumer you can sell your cans and plastic bottles to the recycler by count if you have fewer than 50 items of each product. It is up to the attendant at the recycler if they want to purchase your materials by count in any other quantity than what they are required to. Be aware that by selling your cans and bottles by count you may sometimes end up ahead but at other times, based on the product being sold, you may come out behind what you would have received had you sold the items to the recycler by weight.

Recyclables can be redeemed at the value of the CRV or for their scrap value. The Division of Recycling establishes a count per weight for various containers in an attempt to average the two methods.

To get the exact redemption value you must redeem your recyclables by count. A container is valued at \$0.04 or \$0.08 depending on the capacity. You pay this amount consistently when you buy the commodity and it should be returned to you at the same rate.

Redemption by weight benefits you if the scrap value of glass, plastic, or aluminum increases beyond the CRV amount.

You can find more information about the values of recyclable cans and bottles and the location of recycling centers in your area at the following web link for California's Dept. of Conservation under the Recycle Division: <http://www.consrv.ca.gov/DOR/>