

# SPOTLIGHT ON WEIGHTS & MEASURES

## SONOMA COUNTY SEALER OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES



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### COMPLAINTS

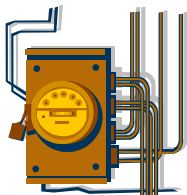
February was a busy month for consumer complaints. The complaints received fell into the following categories:

- Quantity Control 5
- Utility Meters 2

The most interesting complaint involved a suspected bad electric sub-meter at a local mobile home park. This meter was tested by a Standards Specialist and found to be out of tolerance in the tenant's favor. In addition, a second problem was discovered while reviewing the tenant's utility statements. There were errors in regard to meter readings and as a result the tenant was charged an amount other than what his meter registered. The mobile home park's management quickly corrected the situation and the problem was resolved.

If you are a resident of a mobile home park and are not sure how your gas and electric services are billed, it would be in your interest to familiarize yourself with California's Public Utilities Commission (P.U.C.). The P.U.C. regulations apply to how mobile home parks can bill for sub-meter services. More information is available about how PG&E bills for utilities on their website:

[www.pge.com/customer\\_service/english\\_brochures](http://www.pge.com/customer_service/english_brochures)



### CONSUMER INFORMATION

Standards Specialists routinely perform inspections at local service stations and in the process perform two standard inspections for devices – tolerances and labeling requirements.

A typical service station has between 24 and 36 meters. These meters measure and dispense vehicle fuels such as gasoline to diesel. Some of them have the capability to blend "premium" and "regular" gasoline to dispense "plus" or mid-grade fuel.

The specialist first determines if the meters in use are approved for commercial use and appropriate for the function that they are being used. The specialist concentrates the bulk of time determining if the measuring devices installed are performing within allowable tolerance and functioning "correctly".

By using certified testing standards, the Standards Specialist is able to measure the delivery of the meter and determine if it is performing within allowable tolerances. The specialist's "standard" measures in cubic inches, which a ten-gallon fuel delivery on a perfect operating meter would register 2,310 cubic inches. When the dispenser has registered five-gallons the specialist stops the fuel delivery and compares the dispenser's registered delivery to the actual amount delivered to the testing standard. The tolerance for a retail petroleum meter that has been in use is plus or minus six cubic inches on each five-gallon delivery. This translates

to an allowable percentage error range of just over ½ percent. Better put, if you purchased 100 gallons through a retail petroleum meter, it could deliver plus or minus ¼ gallon and would be considered to be within allowable tolerances. If the meter delivered 99.75 gallons or 100.25 gallons, it would be certified as being within tolerance.

Along with testing the meter for accuracy the inspector also inspects the meter for any potential problems that may cause it to perform in a manner that is considered “incorrect”. A meter could be considered incorrect if it displays any of the following problems:

1. A hose leak that may cause the meter to “creep forward” and register while not actually delivering any fuel to the customers fuel tank
2. Electrical interference that may cause the meter to malfunction
3. Faded price indicators on the display
4. Faulty Nozzles (shut off sensor failure)

After checking the station’s meters for performance tolerances the specialist then inspects the dispensers for labeling requirements. The State of California requires service stations to identify retail dispensers with the following items:

1. Brand (Chevron, Shell) and/or trademark
2. Product (Gasoline, Diesel, Kerosene)
3. Grade (Regular, Plus, Premium)
4. Octane (91, 89, 81, etc.)

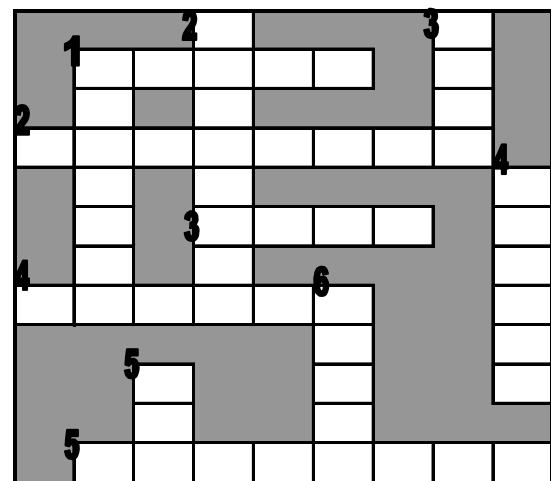
Imagine trying to fill your vehicle with fuel if none of these items were clearly marked on the dispenser. Along with the items mentioned above the dispenser must also clearly identify the “price per gallon” that you will be charged (taxes included). All of these labeling requirements must meet size requirements in order to make it plainly visible to a typical customer what fuel they are dispensing and how much they will be

charged for a purchase.

Service stations must also clearly identify any discounts being offered to their customers if they purchase a service from the station (such as a car wash). This is commonly referred to as the “condition of sale”. For example, a service station offers a reduced gas price if a customer purchases a car wash, the reduced price after the car wash is purchased must be clearly identified to the customer.

The specialist also inspects the street advertisement signs that indicate the service station’s current prices. These signs must meet labeling requirements as well. The storage tank labels are also checked for proper labeling along with the service station’s air and water station. Service stations are required by State law to offer free air and water to their fuel purchasing customers. A sign that explains this law to the customer is to be posted in a reasonable position that a typical customer may readily view it.

### WEIGHTS & MEASURES WORD PUZZLE



- | DOWN                                   | ACROSS                                      |
|--|---|
| 1 - fruits & vegetables                | 1 - libra                                   |
| 2 - to measure the resale of utilities | 2 - exchange of goods & services            |
| 3 - price lower than regular price     | 3 - gross minus net                         |
| 4 - measure of an objects mass         | 4 - inch-pound alternative                  |
| 5 - gross minus tare                   | 5 - official reference for weight / measure |
| 6 - 128 cubic feet                     |   |