

Spotlight on Weights & Measures



Lisa Correia
Agricultural Commissioner/Sealer

Mark Hanson
Chief Deputy Sealer

Editor Fernando Vasquez

COMPLAINTS



June was a quiet month for consumer complaints. Our division received just six complaints for this past month. The complaints fell in to the following categories:

- Service Stations 3
- Quantity Control 2
- Sub-metering 1

The two “quantity control” complaints that we received were against two major national companies. One involved how a men’s clothing company practiced their twice a year sales. A customer who did not receive the posted sale price filed the complaint. The store runs their sale twice a year and requires that their cashiers remember to manually enter the discount. A follow up unannounced audit determined that this was in fact an on going problem. The store was notified that the law mandates that the business carry the responsibility of correctly giving their customer the correct advertised prices. They were also informed that there would be unannounced

audits in the future in order to determine their level of compliance.

The Second “quantity control” complaint involved an overcharge on a hygienic product. The inspector performed an unannounced inspection and determined that the business was in fact charging a higher price for the item than what they were advertising it for. The business was informed of the error and issued a formal “Notice of Violation”.

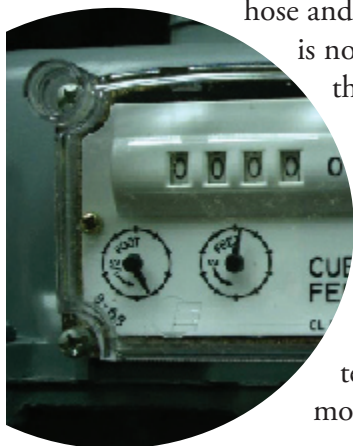
We had three complaints regarding service stations. Two of these complaints involved customers who felt they did not receive the total amount of fuel they paid for. These two complaints were investigated and were not substantiated by our inspection results.

The third complaint involved a meter that, according to the complainant, continued to advance even after the delivery handle was released from the nozzle. This complaint was investigated by one of our inspectors and he determined that

COMPLAINTS

Continued

the dispenser hose had a leak. The service station was informed of the situation and they promptly replaced the hose and thus eliminated the problem. Why they did not do this after the initial complaint is not known but they were reminded that it is the businesses responsibility to maintain their commercial devices in good operating condition.



One of our complaints was against a mobile home park. The complainant had an issue with how the mobile home park went about charging him for sewer fees. The inspector who investigated the complaint determined that there was a master water meter installed to serve the mobile home park and the registration from the meter was used as the gross usage. The cubic feet registered were divided up equally among the park tenants. The inspector determined that the individual tenant was not being fraudulently charged and no action was taken against the mobile home park.

Dividing the water costs evenly among the parks' tenants is a common practice found in mobile home parks and some apartments. The states' water laws and regulating agencies have not completely caught up with changing water practices. As the price of water continues to increase, especially sewer reclamation fees, consumer protection rights will become a hot button issue.

CONSUMER TIP

As motor fuel prices continue to increase there continues to be an increased interest in alternative fuels. One of the latest alternative fuels that has caught the interest of the public, especially here in California, is "bio-diesel". Bio-diesel is an engine fuel that is derived from vegetable oils of mostly soy and corn. It does not contain petroleum-based hydrocarbons and is biodegradable. It also burns cleaner and as a result, puts out less air pollutants.

Bio-diesel does have a couple of drawbacks though. In extreme cold temperatures it can "gel" causing problems when starting the vehicle's engine. Older vehicles that are switched over to "bio-diesel" will have to go through a couple of cleansing cycles that will require the changing of the fuel filter in order to collect sediment removed from the petroleum-based diesel that was previously used in the vehicle.

A conversion kit may also need to be installed on an older vehicle that is converted over and it will require the replacement of fuel hoses and the fuel pump.

Bio-diesel can be blended with standard petroleum based diesel and is rated according to the percentage of fuel mixture in the final product. For example B100 diesel is rated to have 100% bio-diesel while B20 diesel is 20 percent bio-diesel mixed with 80 percent petroleum based diesel.

If you are interested in more information and the latest topics regarding bio-diesel, check out the United States Department of Agriculture information website at the following link:

<http://www.biodiesel.org/usda/>

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

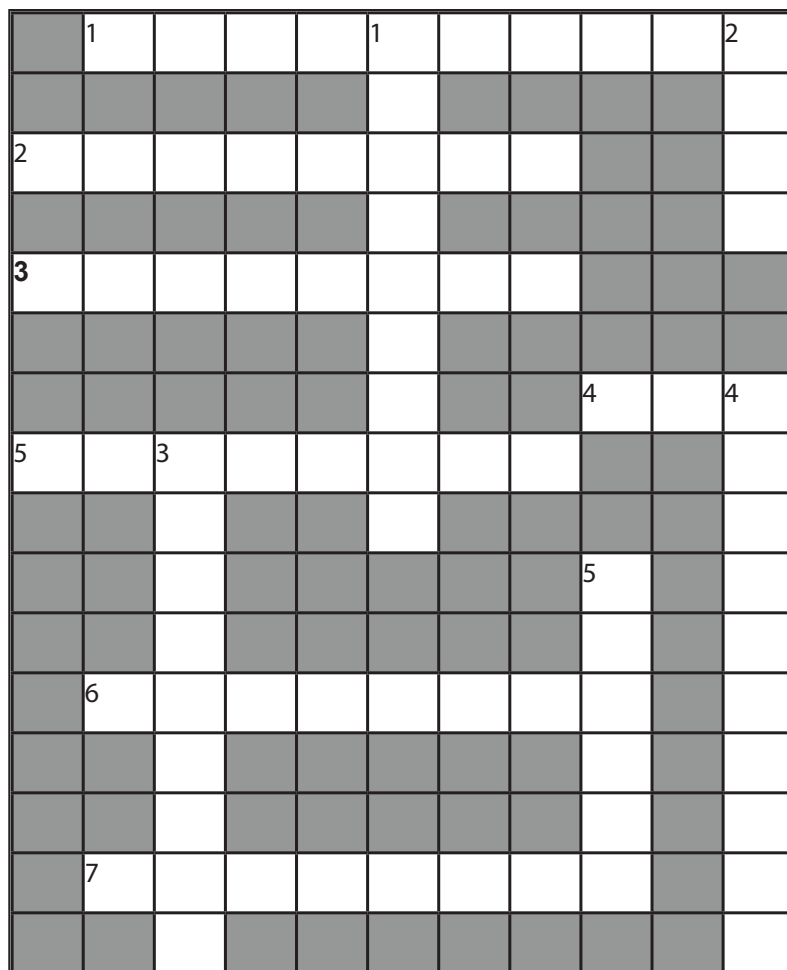
If you've consistently been reading the Spotlight, you will be familiar with the issues in the puzzle.

ACROSS

1. Misleading statement to get you in the door.
2. One who uses up commodities?
3. A "cord" is a measure of _____?
4. Universal product code.
5. To re-sell utilities to a tenant (electricity).
6. Reduced price break.
7. Conditional discount of a product.

DOWN

1. What a consumer consumes
2. Packaging not to be included in product weight.
3. Alternative motor fuel made from vegetable oils.
4. Soils in large amounts are delivered in _____?
5. Rating of a fuels "anti-knock" index?



133 Aviation Blvd., Ste. 110
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

PHONE:

(707) 565-2371

FAX:

(707) 565-3850

E-MAIL: sonomaag@sonoma-county.org

We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.sonoma-county.org/agcomm