

# *Weights and Measures Tips and Hints*

## *The County Sealer*

When you make a purchase at the food store, fill your tank with gasoline at the service station, or buy any merchandise by weight or by measure, you think the transaction is only between you and the vendor. It may be a surprise to know that every such transaction also includes a County Sealer, even though one is not present in person.



The County Sealer is the Weights and Measures official who checks all weighing, measuring, and timing devices used in sales made to the public. This person is always present in spirit, protecting both buyer and seller. Sealers are dedicated persons working quietly and tirelessly to save customers money, and to safeguard vendors' businesses. Errors in either direction, over or under, will cause someone to suffer.

The Weights and Measures official tests and seals all weighing and measuring devices used within Bucks County. To "seal" means to put a lock of sorts on the adjusting mechanism of a device after the item has been inspected and found accurate. "Sealing" prevents an unscrupulous vendor from changing the calibration of a device. An external two-inch round vinyl seal is also placed on each device to inform customers that an accuracy check was performed during a certain month and year.

## *How Are You Protected?*

When you as a consumer make a purchase at a supermarket, gas station, delicatessen, or other retail establishment, do you ever ask yourself if that scale is weighing correctly? Did the prepackaged meat you just purchased have the correct total selling price on the label? Did you receive the correct amount of home heating oil in your last delivery? And the gasoline pump you just used to fill up your tank – did the gas seem a little more costly than usual?

The Weights and Measures inspector is constantly checking and re-checking all of these devices to make sure that any of these mechanical instruments does not malfunction because of normal wear and tear. It is the inspector's job to seek out and find these errors.

## *How "Short Measure" Adds Up*

If a piece of meat selling for \$4.98 a pound has an error in weighing of just one ounce, the error will cost someone 31 cents before the package even leaves the store.

A scale that is incorrect by one ounce on each weighing, making 100 weighings a day over a period of 300 days a year at a unit price of \$2.00 a pound will add up to an error of \$3,750 a year!

An error of three tablespoons in five gallons on a gasoline pump will result in an error of thousands of dollars a year at today's average pump volumes.

If you feel you have been shorted in any manner, call the Bucks County Department of Consumer Protection/Weights and Measures at 215-348-7442.

## *Quality*

When you make a purchase, two elements are primary in your decision: quality and quantity.

Quality is a subjective matter. One person's good quality can be another person's bad taste. In a free market society, deciding on the level of quality of a purchase is left to the individual's personal judgment. The government regulates quality only to the extent that certain minimum standards of health and safety are required. Beyond that, each individual must use his or her own judgment when it comes to "quality".



## Quantity

On the other hand, “quantity” can be determined to a high degree of accuracy. It would be unrealistic for each individual consumer to spend the time and effort it takes to verify the amount contained in every package purchased. It is much more realistic to have a few people check the packages for the general public so that the consumer can be reasonably sure that a package labeled “one pound” actually weighs one pound.

There are such people. They are out there checking the quantity of the contents of various packages in your local supermarket. This requires extensive training, a thorough technical knowledge of the varying characteristics of different types of commodities and a wide range of precise measuring equipment and measurement techniques. They are the Weights and Measures inspectors.

Here are just some of the duties of the Weights and Measures inspectors:

- Make sure all fuel dispensing pumps have the mandated price postings.
- Check for water or other contaminants in fuel storage tanks.
- Test the interlock, anti-drain valve and price accuracy of fuel dispensing devices.
- Test and seal meters for accuracy on retail fuel oil delivery trucks.
- Test and seal timing devices such as parking meters and air hoses at gas stations.
- Inspect off-premises pre-packaged food products for accurate weight, e.g. dairy products, cereal, canned goods, pet foods, etc.
- Check prices on items to be sure they are marked correctly and are legible to the consumer.
- Inspect cash register entries and UPC scanners for accuracy.
- Check advertised items for pricing accuracy.
- Test and seal the calibrating unit on gasoline or kerosene dispensing pumps.
- In the summertime, inspect roadside farm stands and boat marinas.
- Inspect fabric stores that sell cloth by linear measure.

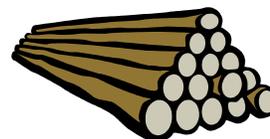
## Helpful Hints

**Gasoline sales** – *When purchasing gas for your vehicle, you should do the following:*

- Regardless of the weather, always observe the transaction.
  -  Make sure all of the numbers on the face of the pump are set to **zero**. You can become the victim of an “inflated” purchase if the previous purchase is on the pump.
  - Check the price signs posted for the gas being purchased. See that the price on the sign corresponds with the computer price shown on the pump face.
  - Make sure the octane rating is posted on the pump. Use the octane recommended by the vehicle manufacturer.
- Beware of anything that impairs your ability to read the pump numbers.
- Avoid getting gas when a delivery truck is re-filling the main storage tanks. Sediment is stirred up and can clog your car’s gas filter.
- Watch all credit card transactions closely. Check the calculations before signing. *Be sure to get a receipt!*
- If you believe that a station is involved in any deceptive practices, call the Bucks County Office of Consumer Protection/Weights and Measures.
- Look for County or State inspection seals, which are usually located on the face of the dispenser.

- **Firewood Sales**

- Firewood must be sold by the cord or fraction of a cord. A cord is a unit of measure 4 feet by 4 feet by 8 feet, or a total of 128 cubic feet.
- An invoice must accompany all firewood sales. The invoice must include the name, address and phone number of the business, the amount and type of wood purchased, along with the price.
- Do the following when you receive a delivery of firewood:
  - Stack the wood carefully.
  - Measure the length, width and height of the stacks in feet.



- Multiply the measurements to obtain cubic feet.
- Add the cubic feet together to determine if each cord equals 128 cubic feet.
- If the measure is short, call the dealer and request delivery of more wood to make up the difference.
- If the dealer refuses to make up the difference, call the Office of Consumer Protection/Weights and Measures and report a short measure sale.

**Mulch Sales** – Examine the load thoroughly before taking delivery. Look for painted wood, glass, and other foreign objects. *Refuse delivery if the mulch appears to be of substandard quality.* In addition, be sure to obtain a receipt with the name, address and phone number of the business, along with the quantity of mulch delivered.

To determine how many cubic yards of mulch you get, measure the volume of the delivery truck. Take the measure of the length, width and height of the leveled load in feet and multiply. Then divide by 27 to obtain the volume of the mulch in cubic yards. Only pay for what is delivered!

### **Market Scales**

- Scale indications must be free and unobstructed so the consumer can have a clear view of the transaction.
- The scale must begin from a zero indication.
- Look for the county seal on the device.
- Read the label. Package labels give consumers helpful information. The amount of the products or the net quantity in the package is marked on the label. The quantity is shown as a weight, measure, or count, such as ounces, pounds, quarts, liters, or square feet.
- Pay only for the product, not the packaging. When you buy potato salad at the deli counter, you should pay only for the salad, not for the weight of the container, commonly referred to as *tare*. Some electronic scales are set to automatically deduct the weight of the packaging. On other scales, the clerk must adjust the scale to deduct the weight of the packaging material. If you have a question, ask to have the package weighed again before you buy.

**Liquid Petroleum Gas** – In areas where piped-in natural gas is not readily available, many homeowners use home delivered LP Gas. This product, which is compressed and in liquid form, is usually metered through an approved device into the homeowner's storage tank from a delivery truck, except when LP gas is delivered and sold to the purchaser in portable containers referred to as bottles.

- Bottled LP gas is sold by weight with the tare weight stamped on the side of the bottle.
- On metered deliveries from a delivery truck, the seller is required to state on the invoice the date of delivery, name and address of the vendor and the purchaser, and the quantity of product delivered in terms of approved units of measure.
- When refilling you portable tank, the scale used is required to be inspected and sealed to insure accuracy.

**Home Delivery Heating Fuel Oil** - For the past thirty years or more, home heating oil has been the primary energy source for most homeowners. Fuel oil for domestic customers must be metered through a device capable of providing a printed ticket indicating the gallons delivered which shall be rendered to the customer at the time of delivery or with the invoice.

- Purchase fuel oil from a reputable dealer whose meters have been tested and approved for accuracy.
- The delivery meter ticket must be inserted into the meter at the point of delivery and under no circumstances may a ticket be in the meter while the truck is in motion.
- Some oil companies have their drivers compute the total price. Be sure the price per gallon appears on the ticket and the charge agrees with the number of gallons delivered.
- A good working knowledge of your tank capacity and spot checks before and after deliveries will help you note any major discrepancies.

**Coal (Hard or Soft)**- For many years coal was the main source of energy in this country until the advent of fuel oil. Coal is now making a come-back in the northeast with the availability of supplemental coal-fired boilers and space heaters. Most users probably purchase coal by the ton and have it delivered to their cellars.

- Coal must be accompanied by the original weighmaster's certificate, which must be given to the purchaser at the time of delivery.
- All weighmaster's certificates are required to indicate the gross, tare, and net weight of the delivery.
- Know the cubic foot dimensions of your coal bin. The average weight of most coal is about 55 pounds per cubic foot. A ton of coal should occupy about 36 cubic feet.

**Scanners** – In February of 1997 a new law took effect requiring annual inspection of Universal Product Code (UPC) scanning systems and Price Look-Up (PLU) devices.

One hundred percent accuracy is the goal for these systems. A test result of 98 percent accuracy or better is required to pass inspection. A test revealing accuracy of less than 98 percent will cause the store to be placed on an increased inspection frequency status. A store in this status will be re-inspected within 30 business days of the original inspection and, if accuracy of less than 98 percent persists, will be inspected within 60 business days of the original inspection. If accuracy of less than 98 percent persists after these three inspections, the store can expect higher-level enforcement actions.

Many stores use electronic scanners to figure the price at the checkout counter. The scanner reads a code on the package. If the scanned price does not agree with the posted price, ask the store manager to correct it. Save the cash register receipt in case you have questions or a problem later on. If the problem is not resolved, contact the County Office of Consumer Protection/Weights and Measures.

**Timing Devices** – Parking meters, vacuums, air pumps, and laundromat dryers are regularly inspected and sealed. Money operated devices *other than parking meters* must have clearly displayed information detailing the method to get your money back if the device is not functioning properly. This information must include the name, address and phone number of the local party responsible for the device. This requirement does not apply to devices at locations where employees are on duty and responsible for resolving any monetary discrepancies for the customer.

