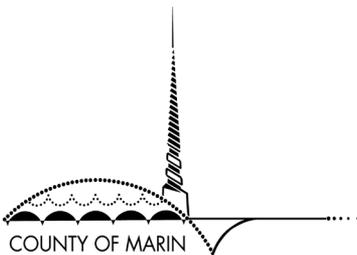

2016
Consumer Protection Report

DOLLAR\$
&
SENSE

*protecting the interests
of the consumer
and the marketplace*



DEPARTMENT OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

MARIN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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I am pleased to submit the inaugural Consumer Protection Report for Marin County. This report highlights some of the consumer protection services that the Department of Weights and Measures provided to the residents, visitors, and businesses of Marin in 2016.

John Quincy Adams in an 1821 report to the Senate said, "Weights and measures may be ranked among the necessities of life, to every individual of human society. They enter into the economical arrangements and daily concerns of every family ... every occupation ... every transaction of trade and commerce ..."

Whether you buy vegetables at a farmers' market, fill up your gas tank, or take your children back-to-school shopping, Marin is a good place to shop and do business. In 2016, our inspectors performed over 10,000 inspections to ensure the accuracy of weighing and measuring devices, and prices charged to consumers.

In 2016, the value of all goods produced and services provided in California was \$2.6 trillion, making California the world's 6th largest economy. The National Institute of Standards and Technology estimates that half of the Gross Domestic Product falls within the influence of Weights and Measures. Therefore, \$1.3 trillion of California's Gross State Product is under the protection of county weights and measures officials!

In addition, the California Department of Food and Agriculture's Division of Measurement Standards determined the cost of providing consumer protection to everyone living in or visiting California to be one penny (1¢) per person per day, or \$3.65 per person annually. Quite a good investment in comparison to the \$3.5 billion in average daily Gross State Product which is overseen by county weights and measures officials.

Our Department is committed to serving the public's interest by ensuring equity in the marketplace and protecting the health and welfare of Marin's residents.

Respectfully submitted,

Stacy K. Carlsen
Agricultural Commissioner
Director of Weights and Measures

NUMBERS at a GLANCE

Weights & Measures Expenditures \$664,658
Weights & Measures Revenue \$258,400

Total Employees 15
Weights & Measures FTE* Employees 3.5
Total Weights & Measures Program Hours 6,213

Businesses Inspected 418
Total Inspections Performed 10,460
Consumer Concerns Investigated 29

Price Accuracy Inspections Performed 294
Items Inspected for Price Accuracy 8,120
Items Found Overcharged to the Customer 71
Items Found Undercharged to the Customer 63

Devices Inspected and Sealed 2,520
Most Common Devices Inspected:
Gas Pumps 1,245
Electric Submeters 634
Counter & Computing Scales 437

Notices of Violation Issued 113
Most Common Violations:
• Equipment not maintained accurately
• Overcharging customers
• Customer not able to see price or weight of item at time of purchase

*FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT

PRICE ACCURACY

Weights and measures inspectors regularly conduct pricing audits at businesses with automated point-of-sale systems (e.g., UPC* or price look-up codes) to verify that prices charged to customers are the same as the prices posted or advertised.

When these systems are inaccurate, customers may be overcharged and unaware they have paid more than the posted or advertised price.

It is against the law for a business to charge more than the price advertised or posted by the store.

Inspectors also make sure the customer can easily see the price of each item as it's being rung up. It's the law to have a customer-facing display.

*UPC (Universal Product Code) or barcode



CONSUMER TIP:

IF YOU SEE AN ITEM ON A SHELF FOR \$2.99, BUT THE PRICE RINGS UP AS \$3.49 WHEN YOU CHECK OUT, YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO THE SHELF PRICE OF \$2.99. SPEAK UP AND TELL THE CHECKER THE SHELF PRICE WAS \$2.99. THEY MUST HONOR THAT PRICE. IF NOT, CALL OUR HELP LINE AT (415) 473-7888 AND WE WILL INVESTIGATE.



87% OF MARIN BUSINESSES COMPLIED WITH PRICE ACCURACY REGULATIONS IN 2016

GAS PUMPS

Have you ever noticed the County of Marin seal when you're pumping gas?

If you see this seal on the pump, you can rest assured that county inspectors have tested and verified the pump for measuring accuracy.

Commercial fuel pumps, such as those dispensing gasoline, diesel, and hydrogen, must function correctly to deliver the amount of fuel for which you are charged.

Also, pricing at the pump must be clearly visible and must match the prices displayed on the street signs.



CONSUMER TIP:

WHENEVER YOU BUY GASOLINE, YOU ARE ENTITLED TO FREE AIR AND WATER AT THAT STATION.

SIMPLY ASK THE ATTENDANT TO TURN ON THE AIR AND WATER FOR YOU AND PRESENT YOUR RECEIPT IF NECESSARY.



98% OF MARIN GAS PUMPS TESTED IN 2016 WERE FOUND ACCURATE

DID YOU KNOW?

GAS PUMPS AREN'T THE ONLY TYPE OF METERS TESTED. OTHER METERS TESTED INCLUDE FABRIC AND CORDAGE, TAXI, ELECTRIC SUBMETERS, AND RETAIL WATER DISPENSERS.

SCALES

If you've purchased meat at the deli, vegetables at a farmers' market, or paid to ship a box by weight then you have been charged based on the weight of the item.

Scales are regularly tested to ensure each scale meets accuracy standards. The scales tested range from small (jewelry, deli and grocery scales) to medium (recycling centers and landscaping materials) to large capacity (livestock and vehicle scales).

Scales found to be inaccurate in favor of the business are placed **OUT OF ORDER**. The scale must be repaired by a certified repairman and tested as accurate before it can be used again by the business.



CONSUMER TIP:

YOU ARE ENTITLED TO SEE THE WEIGHT OF THE ITEM YOU ARE PURCHASING. DURING OUR INSPECTIONS WE ENSURE THE SCALE CAN BE READ BY THE CUSTOMER.



97% OF MARIN COUNTER AND COMPUTING SCALES TESTED IN 2016 WERE FOUND ACCURATE

DID YOU KNOW?

UNDER THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION, ARTICLE 1 SECTION 8, CONGRESS SHALL HAVE THE POWER "TO COIN MONEY, REGULATE THE VALUE THEREOF, AND OF FOREIGN COIN, AND **FIX THE STANDARD OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES**" THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES.

CONSUMER CONCERNS

Consumer confidence can only be gained by ensuring that you, the customer, get what you pay for.

If you have a concern or complaint about a business in Marin County, immediately report it to our office at the number below.

CONSUMER HELP LINE
(415) 473-7888

Issues most commonly reported to our Consumer Help Line:

- Being overcharged on items at the grocery store,
- The sale price was not honored at time of checkout,
- Unable to see the price of items rung up during checkout,
- Suspected gasoline contamination (engine sputtering or dying shortly after fueling up),
- Misleading advertisements for apparel.

CONSUMER TIP:

BY LAW, IF A SALE SIGN IS STILL ON DISPLAY - EVEN IF THE SALE HAS EXPIRED - YOU ARE STILL ENTITLED TO THAT SALE PRICE.

COUNTY OF MARIN

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

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(415) 473-6700 PHONE
(415) 473-7543 FAX
CRS Dial 711

<http://www.marincounty.org/depts/ag>

(415) 473-7888 CONSUMER HELP LINE

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Mary Wahlberg
Ellen Breazeale

Requests for accommodations may be made by calling (415) 473-6700 (Voice),
(415) 473-3232 (TTY) or by e-mail at SParnay@marincounty.org.
Copies of documents are available in alternative formats, upon request.