2016 Consumer Protection Report

DOLLAR$ & SENSE

protecting the interests of the consumer and the marketplace
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 necessaries 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

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**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

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 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.