

# You should know...



North Dakota Public Service Commission

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North Dakota Public  
Service Commission

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## What is Weights and Measures?

It's hard to be a smart consumer these days. You think about the products you buy and the amount you can spend. Can I afford this? Is this the best buy? Am I getting my money's worth?

Almost everything we buy is sold by weight, volume or measure. For example: a pound of hamburger, a gallon of gasoline, a 20-ounce box of cereal. In addition, if we happen to be in the agricultural business, almost everything we sell is sold by weight or volume. For example: a bushel of grain (converted from weight), or a steer sold by the pound.

Without standard measurements, it would be difficult to do even simple things like use cookbooks or buy groceries. We don't carry a scale with us when we check the weight of everything we buy or sell.

For hundreds of years, government weights and measures' programs have been working behind the scenes to protect both the buyer and the seller from malfunctioning devices or from unfair practices.

Our inspectors use extremely accurate equipment to inspect scales, meters, scanning equipment and packaged products at supermarkets, discount stores, department stores, grain elevators, livestock sales rings and gasoline stations. They act as a third party to help maintain fairness and keep the market place in balance.

Consumers have rights and responsibilities in the market place. The Public Service Commission's Weights and Measures inspection and testing program can provide you, the consumer, with important ideas on how to best use weights and measure's information. By knowing what to do, you too can help the market place work at its best.

Weights and Measures' officials play a central role in the marketplace to assure the consumer that they pay only for the product and not the packaging. When you buy coffee beans at \$11.00 per pound, you should only pay for the weight of the beans and not the heavy paper bag with the wire twist top that those beans were placed in. If you buy salad at a deli counter, you should pay only for the salad, not the clear plastic package it comes in. Packaging weight, by law, must be "tared" (removed) before the price per weight is applied to produce a total price.

Many stores use electronic scanners to figure the price at the checkout counter. These scanners are linked to a computer that reads the price of the item. Some scanners are hand-held and the clerk runs the scanner over the price tag. Other scanners are on a counter and items are passed over an electronic reading device. The scanner reads a bar code on the package of the product, sends the data to the computer, which converts it to a price and prints that price onto a paper tape. If scanners are inaccurate,

# What is Weights and Measures?

## (cont.)

consumers and businesses can both lose money. New nationwide studies show that most scanner errors occur on sale items. Weights and Measures' officials should inspect scanners for accuracy to make sure you are charged the correct price; however, North Dakota currently does not have a scanner inspection program.

When purchasing gasoline, accurate delivery and correct measurement are a must. These fuels are sold by volume in gallons and the price you pay for gasoline will depend upon the octane level, the amount you buy, and any discount offered. Weights and Measures' officials routinely check gasoline pumps for accuracy.

Consumers and businesses can both benefit and help Weights and Measures' officials enforce the law and help keep a fair market place. One way is to look for the state Weights and Measures or Registered Service Company (a private

weights and measures inspector) Weights and Measures seal that is required to be displayed on every commercial weighing or measuring device. The seal tells you that a device has been inspected for proper design and installation and tested for accuracy. If a device currently in use has no seal, a **RED** seal, or an **ORANGE** "Not Sealed" tag on it, do not buy or sell across that unsealed or rejected device. Instead, contact the Compliance Division of the Public Service Commission as soon as possible at 701-328-2400 or e-mail [sbauske@nd.gov](mailto:sbauske@nd.gov).

*Weights and Measures is everyone's business.*