

# Weights and Measures FAQ

## General Weights and Measures

**Q: If there is no seal on the device, how do I know if it is accurate?**

**A:** All commercial devices should have a round paper seal showing the date it was tested by our department. If it does not have a seal, call our department at **530-470-2690**.

**Q: Can any scale be used or does it have to be a special scale?**

**A:** Only scales that have been approved for commercial use (type approved) and sealed by the department may be used for a commercial transaction. A licensed service agent may place a device into service before our inspectors conduct their tests.

**Q: What is "tare"?**

**A:** Tare, or tare weight, is the weight of a bag, soaker, ice, packaging, wrapping, box, bin, pallet, truck, or any material not considered product or part of the net weight. Tare weight plus net weight equals gross weight. Selling by gross weight or measure is a misdemeanor (Business & Professions Code 12023).

**Q: Do you investigate complaints?**

**A:** Investigation of consumer complaints is a high priority in our department. All complaints are assigned to an inspector and investigated as quickly as possible. When a complaint is outside our jurisdiction, we direct the consumer to the appropriate agency.

## Retail Wood

**Q: How do I know if I'm getting a full cord of wood?**

**A:** A cord of wood is 128 cubic feet, and cannot be delivered as one load in a regular pick-up truck. The wood must be neatly stacked before it can be measured to confirm you have received the full amount.

**Q: How can I avoid short wood deliveries?**

**A:** Ask for the seller to stack the wood (there may be a small fee for this), or to wait while you stack it, before paying the seller. Ask for an invoice with the seller's name, address and phone number, the number or portions of cord(s) delivered, the date and the amount. Pay once you are satisfied that you have received the agreed upon amount.

**Q: What if I think I was shorted after the seller is gone?**

**A:** First, neatly stack the wood, and call the County Department of Ag, Weights and Measures to investigate. **DO NOT BURN ANY OF THE WOOD UNTIL IT HAS BEEN INSPECTED.** It can be helpful to take a picture of the stacked wood as soon as it has been stacked.

## Petroleum/Retail Gas

**Q: How often do you check gas stations?**

**A:** Gas stations are inspected every year. Gas stations that do not pass an initial inspection are placed on an increased frequency of inspection. Increased frequency of inspection can

be every six months depending on the number of meters that failed on the first visit.

**Q: Do you phone businesses before you inspect them to let them know you are coming?**

**A:** No, all visits are unannounced to verify the business practices being inspected are representative of standard operating procedure.

**Q: Do you check the quality of the fuel, too?**

**A:** Yes, we check the quality of fuel at every station in the county. Each tank is tested for the presence of water. Samples of fuel are sent to the Division of Measurement Standards Petroleum Lab for octane and quality analysis. Petroleum and automotive products must meet SAE and ASTM Standards.

**Q: What happens if a gasoline or diesel meter is found to be in error?**

**A:** If any meter or other commercial device is found out of tolerance, or is overcharging the customer, it is placed out of order (red tagged) until repaired by a certified device repairman. After the device has been repaired, we recheck it to verify that it is in compliance.

**Q: Have you ever found anyone deliberately cheating?**

**A:** Intent is hard to prove. We prosecute violations civilly or criminally. We hold civil penalty hearings to resolve serious or repeated violations, or refer cases to the District Attorney. Several of our statutes are strict liability, meaning that intent does not have to be proven.

**Q: Have you ever closed a whole station?**

**A:** Yes, there have been several instances of contaminated fuel being sold, which resulted in station closure.

## Utility Meters

**Q: Do you test utility meters?**

**A:** We only inspect electric, vapor (gas), and water meters that utility companies do not. An example of these meters is a mobile home park in which there is a master meter and an individual submeter at each mobile home. We test the submeters and a utility company (such as PG&E) tests the master meter. We test these submeters every ten years.

**Q: What authority do you have over utility meters?**

**A:** We have original jurisdiction over sub-metered installations; where a landlord is master metered by PG&E and has individually metered apartments, mobile home spaces or business locations. Each unit must be individually metered if there are separate charges for gas, electricity, or water.

**Q: What information is required on a utility bill?**

**A:** The Public Utilities Commission requires that all information and charges that appear on a customer's bill follow the format of the serving utility:  
—Opening and closing reading dates

- Opening and closing meter readings
- Days in billing period
- Rate code being charged
- Baseline use and rate
- Over baseline use and rate
- Total charges for the billing period

**Note:** A copy of the prevailing rate schedule must be posted in a common area of the office building.

For questions or complaints, contact the Nevada County Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures, 530-470-2690 or [agdept@co.nevada.ca.us](mailto:agdept@co.nevada.ca.us).