



IT'S A METRIC WORLD . . . EVEN IN THE U.S.

NIST Metric-Only Labeling Forum, 7 November 2002

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Through this forum, NIST and the NCWM are providing a superb opportunity for discussing the pros and cons of removing a restriction which forces companies to state both metric and inch-pound units on product labels. I appreciate the opportunity to give you my views. You have heard important views and rationale from the speakers before me, and I'll try to bring it all together in the big picture.

The goal of the U.S. Metric Association is to assist consumers, companies and educators in the transition to U.S. metrication, and we regularly communicate with people from all these sectors. In the last decade and a half, metric usage in this country has really mushroomed. It's probably not a reach to say that 70 %, or more, of major companies use the metric system in their operations, and in the neighborhood of 30 % of small businesses have adopted it.

The U.S. Metric Association has provided guidance and assistance to scores of companies. Among these are Eastman Kodak, Pitney Bowes, Gillette and many others. But the really big jump in metric usage has been by consumers. Consumers all use the metric system. I would go so far as to say that they have accepted it with overwhelming zeal. Now I can't say there have been any marches on Washington, demanding the metric system. But, the fact that consumers use it every day is telling evidence that they are using it without problems or difficulty. There's a handout in the packet you received today, which describes the overwhelming number of both foreign and domestic metric products consumers buy. The packet also shows how consumers use the metric system every day at home, at play and on their jobs.

But consumers don't really think about goods being metric. There are so many metric goods on the shelves that consumers are already familiar with, that often they just buy the size that looks right without checking the quantity declarations. And unit pricing is a big assist for those who do want to compare values. Companies really have done a great job of helping consumers learn metric by doing, and that's welcome progress.

This metric-only labeling amendment will allow companies to do even more to simplify shopping for all of us. A convincing case can be made that single quantities make it much easier to compare products than having to muddle through the multiple quantities used now.

In fairness, however, I must admit there is a small contingent of anti-metric folks, too. They even have a Web site titled "Metric Sucks." These people are suffering from what I call "change-paranoia." They want to retain historical measures based on barleycorns and king's feet, obviously unaware that there is no end-use for the inch-pound system in the 21st century. They haven't keyed in to the fact that the metric system is the international system of measurement, and for good reason, it is the measurement system of all science and high technology, and most of global commerce. And, ironically, these anti-metric folks are blind to the fact that the metric

system is integral to computer technology, without which they could not even have a Web site to advertise their Luddite views.

From baby products to firearms, American consumers buy metric. They drive metric cars, motorcycles, bicycles and farm machinery because high-tech manufacturing and the global economy require these be built to metric standards. They use metric computers, floppy disks, DVDs, cell phones, electric tools, cameras, videos and light bulbs. These all employ metric units.

They play on metric skis and skates. They use metric when they drink liquor, wine, soft drinks and water, run 10 K races and view Olympic events, all of which use metric units. They pursue good health with prescription drugs and vitamins, read nutrition labels, watch calories and fat grams, all expressed in metric units. They keep clean with soaps and gels in metric-size containers, and strive to enhance their appearance and minimize wrinkles with beauty products in metric-sized jars. They even feed their doggies from 8 kilogram bags of kibble. But please don't suggest metricating football. After all, some things are sacred.

The U.S. Metric Association does not support the notion of packaging in standard metric sizes, nor does this amendment. We believe companies are the best judges of the sizes to use in marketing their products.

Our military operations are even conducted in metric. Its use here is nothing short of essential, especially in international military operations conducted in concert with forces from other countries. All soldiers must understand the same directions and distances lest they be in harm's way during firing and bombing. The world speaks metric and so must we.

None other than President Bush speaks metric in order to be understood by the world community. In his speech a few weeks ago at the U.N., he used *no* inch-pound units at all. Quoting, he said, "... tens of thousands liters of anthrax . . .," "... three metric tons of material that could be used to produce biological weapons. . .," and "... Scud-type missiles with ranges beyond 150 kilometers" (unquote)

It is of interest to note that in 1992 it was President Bush senior, who issued the Executive Order directing the federal agencies to bump up their efforts to remove barriers to metrication and implement the Omnibus Trade Act of 1988, passed by Congress. Compliments are in order for the excellent work accomplished by the National Conference on Weights and Measures in carrying out this law. As part of this effort, under the Uniform Packaging and Labeling Regulation, I believe that over forty states now allow consumer packages to be labeled with only metric units. This is not the time to be timid about expanding the use of the metric system in *any* application. It's time to bring Federal legislation up to speed with the states that have already recognized the value of this step.

We're going full speed ahead in adopting the metric system because so many factors in the global environment require that the U.S. use metric technology. And the long-range benefits we can capture dictate that we do this. Adopting the metric system might be likened to the proverbial snowball picking up speed and size. As one area goes metric, it pulls another and another to metric usage. One example, as companies have gone to metric production, their employees have become familiar with metric units. We should not be debating, we should concentrate on picking up as many of the advantages of metrication as possible. And we should do it as quickly as possible, for consumers, companies and the education community.

Companies that my association has worked with during their metric conversion certainly are not missing out on any benefits. They use the metrication opportunity to streamline designs, standards, and manufacturing processes, which translate into greater competitiveness and enhanced consumer satisfaction. Kodak Vice President, Charles Goslee, summed up what global U.S. companies tell us, and I quote, "Using the system of measure the rest of the world is using becomes a *must* for a global company to effectively operate and realize the many benefits of global parts sourcing, service, componentry, and to have the ability to technically exchange information on a common measurement basis around the world." (unquote)

Expanding our exports requires that we make more metric goods to suit the demands of our foreign customers. Over 94 % of the world's population use the metric system, and if we don't supply them with metric products, some other country will. This is a very important point for consumers to take note of. Expanding our exports means more jobs. The U.S. Department of Commerce has reported that, for every \$ 1 billion dollars in exports about 20,000 U.S. jobs are created. Looking at the larger picture, growing our exports is one of the surest ways to grow our shaky economy, and we must employ ways to reduce our mammoth \$37 billion negative balance of trade.

Benefits accrue to some sector of the economy with every advance in metric usage. Consumers are not aware of how just this one small step in labeling regulation will benefit them in ways that that will positively impact their lives and their pocketbooks. Prices of goods can be made cheaper when production costs are held down. Companies are looking for ways to be competitive in the global economy. Making one label, acceptable the world around, is one way to cut costs. *Who can reasonably oppose a step that will help expand our exports, increase jobs and contribute to a healthier U.S. economy while keeping prices lower for the American consumer?*

And there's one last benefit, which in the long run may be *the most important*. That is, improving the education of our students who will be our future workers. On international tests of math and science, our students score very low, and in understanding of measurement they place *dead last* in the world. No wonder! Educators insist that they must continue to teach both the inch-pound and the metric systems because kids encounter inch-pound units in the marketplace. It's not hard to understand how confused students can get when studying two sets of measures, simultaneously. Their scores bear that out. So let's take this step to help curtail the use of inch-pound units in the nation's marketplace.

Keep in mind that allowing products to be labeled in metric-only units is an *option*. Companies will be able to use both inch-pound and metric units on their labels if they prefer.

ANY WAY YOU LOOK AT IT, THERE ARE ONLY GAINERS AND NO LOSERS. SO LET'S GO FOR IT!!