

METRIC

Metric Commission Canada

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MINISTER TELLS FORUM:

MCC will be history, but metric will stay

The Canadian government won't be going to the Supreme Court over "a tankful of gas", but rather over its responsibility for a universal system of measurement in the marketplace to ensure protection for both buyers and sellers, says the Hon. Judy Erola.

Canada's Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs outlined the government's position during a speech to some 200 participants at the Metric Forum held in Ottawa on April 13th.

Mrs. Erola was referring to the government's appeal of an Ontario court decision which ruled in favor of two Toronto gas station operators charged with offences resulting from selling gasoline by the gallon.

The government has declared a moratorium on the application of regulations dealing with the sale of certain consumer products in metric measure, pending the appeal.

That decision has led to misinterpretation of the government's commitment to metric, the Minister said, and the impression that the program is on hold has been heightened by the announcement that the Metric Commission will cease to exist as of March 31, 1985.

However Mrs. Erola stated: "While the Metric Commission will become history, the metric conversion program will still be moving along. . . . it is our intention to phase out the Commission, not metric conversion."

She said that the Commission is being phased out because it has largely completed its work — "an astonishing amount in 12 years" — and that the final task will be coordinated by a metric office within the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

The Minister observed during her speech that the major thrust of conversion in Canada had taken place with "hardly a ripple" as the industrial and business complex "quietly changed over" with millions of workers doing their job in a metric environment.

However, when conversion began to affect the general public, "we began to encounter people who felt that metric wasn't just a measurement system founded on reason. . . . to them it was a foreign invention with socialist overtones," and was regarded as a denial of freedom of choice.

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Forum urges resumption of enforcement

Warning of "backsliding" in the retail industry, participants in the Metric Forum in Ottawa drafted about 25 resolutions urging the government to swiftly reinstate enforcement of metric weights and measures regulations.

There was unanimous support for three recommendations submitted by the Consumers' Association of Canada, including one that the government go directly to the Supreme Court of Canada to resolve the dispute that led to a moratorium on enforcement, and do so as quickly as possible and one recommending that the practice of dual advertising be extended to the end of 1985, and that the government restore the emphasis on metric weights and prices at the retail level.

Jim Hastings, president of IGA Canada Ltd., told the Forum: "We are running out of time." He said evidence of backsliding among retailers "could be the start of a snowball, and all the time and money spent to get this far could be wasted."

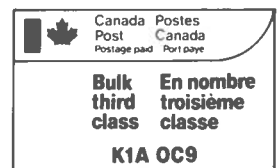
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Forum urges enforcement be resumed

Ted Kerr of Dominion Stores said: "The retail conversion program went well up to the time of the moratorium." However, he added that he had seen evidence of backsliding in 25 cities across Canada, and that there was reason to believe the program was beginning to fall apart.

Speaking to reporters following the Forum, Consumer and Corporate Affairs Minister Judy Erola said the Forum "has given us the opportunity to get a report card on metric conversion. It's clear that it's here and people want us to get on with the job."

The Minister added however, that she would await results of the first appeal, expected May 23, before deciding whether to push for direct referral to the Supreme Court.

Mrs. Gina Hartley, chairman of the Consumers' Association, Metric Committee, put forward the CAC's concerns in her presentation as a member of the panel on Metric and the Consumer — the third and most lively of three panel discussions which took place during the day.

Also making a case for more rapid movement toward logical package sizes, Mrs. Hartley said that metric conversion had not yet brought about a situation that made it easy for consumers to "comparison shop". Manufacturers were still "playing marketing games", she said, and "the consumer is caught in the middle."


She said that strong, clearly seen leadership was necessary from government "to get us through."

Ms. Ellen Roseman, consumer editor of the Toronto Globe and Mail, also voiced complaints about retail packaging and said the government should go further in regulating package sizes.

However, Alan Brownridge of Proctor and Gamble said packagers had accomplished a great deal considering the thousands of packaged goods on the market. "The only thing left to do in future," he said, "is to simplify some of the numbers."

Hastening the final stages of conversion was also a dominant theme for members of the panel dealing with metric in industry. Again, there was a strong call for firm government leadership, and some participants chided government for frequently failing to use SI in its own operations, citing a number of examples.

The panel pointed out a "chicken-and-egg" syndrome in demand and supply, particularly in the construction industry. Suppliers often didn't stock metric sizes, citing a lack of demand. Users couldn't get metric sizes, citing the reluctance of suppliers to stock them.

Earlier in the day, the Metric International Panel told the Forum of the various approaches to metric conversion which had been taken, ranging from the strong legislative approach in Australia to the fully voluntary approach of the United States. 

4.5 L is about a gallon.

(cont. from page one)

Minister says metric will stay

She said this argument had always puzzled her. "We never had much freedom of choice in our measuring system.


"You had to buy gasoline in gallons. . . you had to buy sugar in pounds. . . you bought milk in quarts. . . you didn't choose which system to use. You used the one that was in place. Freedom of choice was not something you generally brought to measurement in the marketplace.

"And so," she said, "we may well end up before the Supreme Court of Canada not, as some will suggest, over a tankful of gas, but over the responsibility of the Government of Canada to ensure fair and workable universal systems of measurement in the marketplace. We may end up there determining what sort of protection both buyers and sellers are entitled to.


"The government must ensure that the marketplace is an orderly place where buyers and sellers have rules they can understand, and systems that can be monitored and checked," Mrs. Erola said.

"To our children, the problems of metric conversion will be boring and irrelevant. . . metric will be the only system they really understand."

However, in the intervening years until "they push us aside and take over", Mrs. Erola said, "we must do what we can to ensure that the changes which directly affect consumers go smoothly and without major disruptions.

"Our lifestyle will be measured in metric, but we want to move into that lifestyle with as little trauma as possible." 

More to come

Metric/Métrieque delayed its deadlines in order to provide a summary of the Metric Forum held in Ottawa on April 13. A more complete outline of proceedings will be included in the June issue. 



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Teaching Metric

A recent survey of public school administrators of all 50 state school systems by the Office of Metric Programs in the U.S. Department of Commerce showed that all are teaching metric, with metric used as the predominant measuring system in some areas.

Metric is taught "fairly universally" according to the OMP.

Some samples:


Chicago Public Schools — Metric measures are taught as the primary system of measure, with standard units being taught as a secondary system of measure. State and local funds have been used to train teachers to teach the metric system.

Maryland — Students presently in grade nine and all students entering grade nine from now on will have to pass the Maryland Functional Mathematics test to graduate. The measurement domain of that test utilizes only the metric system.

New York — All measurement in the kindergarten-6th grade mathematics program is metric. High school mathematics and science Regents examinations also include metric terminology.

South Carolina — The inclusion of metric units in all activities that are measurement related is an ongoing reality.

District of Columbia — The school system is committed to metric education.

Florida — The state has adopted statutes that say beginning in the 1980-81 school year, all public schools of Florida shall provide instruction in the use of metric measurements and measurement language. 

**Roast chicken weighing
1 kg is about three servings.**

Metric Predominant in Ontario Schools

Metric education has placed Ontario's elementary pupils at an advantage. This is the conclusion of a study recently completed and published by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

The objectives of the study were fourfold:

- to determine the extent of the teaching and use of metric and imperial units of measurement in elementary schools
- to obtain opinions about "metric-imperial duality"
- to determine what units pupils use in their everyday transactions
- to ascertain what parents and educators think that pupils will need to know about both systems of measurement in the near future and whether they think pupils will be at an advantage or disadvantage when dealing with measurement.

Fifty-one English and French public and separate elementary schools from all parts of the province were surveyed and formed the base of the study: pupils, parents, teachers and principals were interviewed.

The findings indicated clearly that metric measurement predominates in all classrooms. Teachers expressed opposition to the teaching of imperial units. While 60% of the teachers said they mention imperial units in their classrooms, fewer than 2% teach imperial units in a formal way.

Parents, teachers and principals were asked to what degree pupils are able to operate in the imperial and the metric systems. All responded that children operate well in the metric system and poorly in the imperial system.

As to the system the children actually use, 88% of the teachers said that their pupils use the metric system more naturally in the school environment; 50% felt that the children use the imperial system more naturally at home; and 26% said that the children favour the metric

system in the home as well as at school.


To the question "... What system does your child use?", 63% of the parents replied, "mostly metric"; 20% said the child used imperial and metric systems equally; 11% responded, "mostly imperial" and 6% were uncertain.

Parents and teachers were unanimous in their opinion that pupils will need to know all the common metric units in order to deal with measurement in the future. However, 50% of the parents felt their children should know such common imperial units as the inch, foot, mile, quart and pound.

Many parents said that, although they personally feel uncomfortable with the metric system, the schools should teach only metric and not confuse the children by dealing with both systems. Keep the emphasis on metric measurement in the schools, said parents.


The message from educators: to reintroduce compulsory teaching of the imperial system would be a grave error.

Further information on the study may be obtained from:

Mr. J. Malcolm
Regional Superintendent of
Education
Ministry of Education
Northwestern Ontario Regional
Office
Box 5000
Thunder Bay, Ontario
P7C 5G6 

Estimating On-Road Fuel Consumption

Record the amount of fuel purchased and the odometer distance for each of several tank fill-ups, then use the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{Total fuel consumed (L)} \times 100}{\text{Distance travelled (km)}} = \text{Fuel consumption (L/100 km)} $$

Overcome the "catti"

Hong Kong is moving steadily toward metric use, spurred by economic concerns and government action.

"It is not a question of whether or not we should go metric; it is a crucial question of economic survival. The sooner we are able to adapt to the new situation, the better it will be for Hong Kong and its people," said Ophelia Cheung, a member of the Hong Kong Metrication Committee in a recent Associated Press interview.


Hong Kong began its transition process in 1976 when a Metrication Ordinance was enacted. This legislation states that Hong Kong intends to move to using metric and provides for converting nonmetric units in existing legislation.

Government policy is to move gradually into metric use without specific deadlines, according to David Tsui of the Hong Kong Office of Commercial Affairs in New York.

The government initiated a massive publicity campaign to educate the public about metric and the country's transition policy through radio jingles, theatre productions, game days, poster competitions, writing contests, seminars, television variety shows and radio and television quiz shows.

Currently, gasoline is sold in Hong Kong by the litre, the plastics and tailoring industries have begun metric transition programs, and government services such as the postal service, education department, customs, and others use metric.

The major obstacle to using metric in Hong Kong is the catti, an ancient, traditional measuring unit still used by market and street hawkers. There are also some semantic problems since there are no separate words in Chinese for "thousand" and "kilo" as a prefix.

(Reprinted from the Metric Reporter of the American National Metric Council). 

Canadian Construction Association Promotes Metric


Bob Schuett, newly elected chairman of the Canadian Construction Association, has lost patience with those who would delay and denounce metric conversion. In an interview with Alex Jenkins, editor of Heavy Construction News, he expressed his exasperation:

"Metric conversion? I am totally and unalterably in favour of it. If we procrastinate any longer, we're just pouring money down the drain.

"Anybody who doesn't actively promote metric conversion is doing the industry a disservice. I can't be any stronger than that. I say it quite deliberately, because we looked at it and studied it to death.

"There's a misconception about metric. People forget it was an industry initiative, and it's about damned time that people stopped making a political football out of something that is clearly to the benefit of the industrial infrastructure of the country.

"We should finish the job; and when it's finished, we'll all look back on it and say: 'Well, it's done. Now let's get on to something else.'

"It's nonsense that some politicians are trying to make hay out of whether they can pour imperial gallons. They should realize one thing: they're pouring their imperial gallons into a metric gas tank. The cars that the gas is going into are built in metric, and the gas is probably going through a metric nozzle. They are losing their sense of perspective by playing political games with something that, to me, is clearly a non-political item." 

Three medium potatoes weigh about 300 g.

Automotive Industry's Influence on Conversion

The preeminent position of the automotive industry in conversion to metric measurement was underscored in an address to the American Society of Agricultural Engineers by Page L. Bellinger, Manager of Engineering Standards for the multinational manufacturer, Deere & Company.

"In both the U.S. and Canada, the automotive industry has had the greatest single influence on the metric transition in manufacturing. Since their principal suppliers also supply our industry, the transition has been made somewhat easier for us in some areas. The Ford Escort and new General Motors cars are well-accepted metric products. General Motors' metric J-car series was planned to be manufactured in 11 locations in eight countries . . . and that would have been virtually impossible on an inch basis." 

Big Savings for Big Companies

Metric conversion has meant big savings for big companies, says the American National Metric Council:

* IBM saves \$2 to \$5 million a year by using metric position dimensioning in two computer software items.

* General Motors saves \$1.6 million a year by using metric in resizing and reducing the variety of electric wire.

* Caterpillar saves \$900 000 to \$1.6 million a year through eliminating redesign in overseas plants, reduced numbers of steel sizes, and lower inventories.

* Dupont saves \$200 000 annually by changing the packaging of one product to metric. 