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Feature Article

## Product Shrinkage – It's not your imagination!

### Part II

As price-conscious consumers, we aim to maximize the value of whatever products we're buying. It is indeed hard to imagine that a bar soap or washing soda you use daily actually loses weight while lying on the shelves in supermarkets.

Not just that but tobacco as well.

Well, yes, it does!

There are several perishable and non-perishable items which dry out and lose weight (shrink) when compared to the initial weight marked on the package. This is referred to as retail shrinkage which is the percentage of products lost when initially packed by the manufacturer when compared with the weight of the same product at the point of sale.

The Consumer Council of Fiji last week highlighted items such as chicken, onions, potatoes and garlic which shrink in size and therefore these items have a permissible deficiency of 5 percent as permitted by law.

Items such as **bar soaps, cotton wool, mushrooms, soap flakes and washing soda also**, shrink in size while being displayed for sale at retail outlets. But many consumers do not know that these items also have permissible deficiency attached to it which varies in percentage.

Below is a list of items which under the National Trade and Measurement Decree 1989 Regulations 42 and 43, have varying permissible deficiency.

Product	Permissible Deficiency (%)
Cotton wool	7
Glauber salts	7
washing soda	7
whole hams	7
oven- baked animal biscuits	9
Tobacco/ Soap flakes	10
Personal soap tablets (medicinal or toilet)	11
Personal deodorant tablets	12
Soap powder (excluding detergent powders)	15

Mushrooms	18
Bar soaps	21

These are basic household items which many consumers use daily such as bar soaps, soap powder, soap flakes, mushrooms, cotton wool and personal deodorant tablet. Unfortunately, not all consumers are aware that these items go through shrinkage or weight loss while on display. They also don't know that if these products have shrunk more than the permitted permissible deficiency then it can only be sold at a revised price based on its actual weight and **not the** weight stated on the package.

While, the inspectors attached with Department of National Trade Measurement & Standards are mandated under **National Trade Measurement Decree, 1989** (*National and Trade Measurements (Pre-packed articles)(Packaging) Regulation 1989*), to inspect pre-packed products and the packaging on display in supermarkets, the shop/retailer should also take responsibility to keep a tab on shrinking products stacked on shelves. The traders can protect consumers by removing items from the shelves that has shrunk beyond the allowed deficiency.

Under this Regulation, inspectors are given powers to visit any place of business and examine the articles displayed on the shelves. During the visitations, they pick items randomly and weigh them. Upon weighing the items, if it is found that the products have shrunken beyond the permissible deficiencies then the trader is advised to provide remedy by re-packaging the products which will be sold at a revised price.

The Council advises consumers to be careful at all time. In case of any slight suspicion of shrinkage, they can always request for the product to be re-weighed before buying. Consumers can also contact the Council and/or the Department of National Trade Measurement & Standards for advice on the products and its permissible deficiencies.

**In our next week's contribution to this column, we will look at measuring instruments, its importance and how it is adjusted, dismantled and re-installed.**