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Feature Article

Part IV

Detecting a Tampered Weighing & Measuring Instrument

Use of weighing and measuring instruments is very important for effective functioning of any economy. It plays a vital role in protecting consumers from malpractice of underweight or under measured goods.

All weighing and measuring instrument used for trade must be suitable for its intended purpose and be accurate. Or else, consumers will not get value for their money.

However, for many of us who are not experts, it will be difficult to detect a weighing instrument which is defective or has been tampered with. So it is important for us to learn about the basic features which are found in the weighing instrument that will indicate worthiness of the instrument.

Last week, the Council highlighted that weighing instruments are checked by the inspectors from the Department of National Trade Measurement and Standards. The Department places stamp sticker which has date (month/year) of inspection on the instrument.

This sticker is usually placed on the face of the weighing instrument where it can be easily read by consumer. Since the stickers are made out of paper, it tends to fade or be washed away when cleaning the instrument and it might not give full information as the original sticker.

There are also other security measures in place to indicate to a consumer if a weighing instrument has been tampered with.

For instance, for the *mechanical weighing instrument*, one security feature apart from a stamp sticker is known as a 'lead plug' (type of wire) which is pasted on the face of the instrument with the coat of arm stamped on it.

The scale should always be placed in an open space where consumers can sight the lead plug and consumers should ensure that the scale is at zero before any weighing is done.

An *electronic weighing instrument*, which is found in most supermarkets, the security features are: sticker stamp, tamper-proof seals plus sealing lead with the coat of arm (crown).

Tamper proof seals are a silver sticker which are placed in such a way that if a person wishes to interfere with the weighing instrument, they may only be able to do so by removing the seal. Without breaking this seal, no one can alter the machine.

Once this seal has been removed and a person tries to reseal it, then the seal will show the word "VOID" on it. This clearly indicates that the instrument has been tampered with.

Also, the sealing lead with the coat of arms (crown) is only available with the inspectors from the Department of National Trade Measurement and Standards, which is placed on the machine and if this is not found on the machine then the consumer should know that the machine has been tampered with.

If consumers reasonably believe that the weighing scale is not giving an accurate reading then they should check out the sealing provisions placed on the instrument.

Consumers must also know that the colour of sealing lead with the crown stamp varies within Fiji.

In the central/eastern division **orange** colour sealing lead with the crown stamp is used while **red** is used in western division and **blue** being used in the northern division.

It is expected that due to wear and tear, any weighing machines need upgrading and repair work from time to time. Once the machines are fixed, the traders must get the machines re-stamped and sealed by the inspectors. No weighing instruments can be used without proper inspections and seal/stamp.

Regular inspection of weighing instruments will detect the unscrupulous traders involved in cheating members of the public by selling underweight items. An example of this is bread, which has been reported in the media lately.

Consumers are advised to take note of the stamp. If they cannot locate it due to peeling-off, they can always request the trader to see the tamper proof seal.

Next week, read more on consumer/trader responsibility when dealing with weighing and measuring instruments.