



# UKMA news

The newsletter of the UK Metric Association

Campaigning for a single rational system of measurement

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See section entitled 'What's the point of standards?' on page 7

Google gets it right though..



## AGM Conference - Chairman's report:

### 1 - New legislation affecting metrication

#### Units of Measurement Directive

- Packaged Goods Regulations
- Draught beer and cider
- Units of Measurement Directive
- Amends original Directive 80/181/EEC
- Not confined to specific purposes
- Authorises "supplementary indications" indefinitely
- Deletes acre from list of permitted non-SI units
- Deletes requirement to "fix a date" for metric road signs
- Review in 2019
- Must be enacted by end 2009
- Misrepresented by media

Discussion: is the withdrawal of the EU a help or a hindrance to our campaign?

#### Packaged Goods Regulations

Required by Directive 2007/45/EC

- Deregulates all packaged goods except wine and spirits from 11 April 2009
- No advice to consumers from Government or EU

UKMA issued press release, warning of downsizing, stressing the importance of "unit pricing" - largely ignored by media

## Holidays

Here's hoping all UKMA members had a happy holiday.

Did your plan include a look at the weather prospects using the BBC web page?



Shame about the kph. Will they ever learn?

## Chairman's report cont'd:

### *Draught beer and cider*

- Consultation was included with packaged goods regs consultation
  - Do we need "specified quantities"?
  - Should there be a wider range, e.g 2/3 pint?

UKMA said: deregulate quantities provided that:

- Quantity is clearly marked
- Unit price is displayed

No response announced yet, but Dept of Health objected to deregulation on grounds that

- drinkers would not be able to measure their consumption
- Metric measures would cause "confusion"

NMO have indicated in correspondence that no change is planned

## 2 - Research project

### *Why research?*

- Abundance of myths and misinformation – widely believed, esp in media
- Lack of authoritative research evidence to refute these myths etc
- Government not interested so far in funding research
- UKMA itself has no funds

### *What research?*

- Criteria
  - financial and economic costs
  - safety
  - international competitiveness
  - science
  - educational standards
  - cultural identity
- Topics
  - retailing
  - advertising and product description
  - pubs
  - road signs
  - health services
  - education system
- Analyse by
  - Age
  - Sex
  - Educational attainment
  - Occupation
  - Country of birth
- Will demographic change affect this balance?
- Does the muddle cause innumeracy?
- Subset: usage in the media
- Relate to attitudes to:
  - Change generally
  - Authority
  - EU and foreigners generally
  - Science
  - Education
- Analyse by age, sex, education, occupation, country of birth
- Reasons for opposition
- How to overcome opposition

### *Other topics*

- Attitudes of stakeholders

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- Enforcement of existing law
- Political costs of completing metrication

### ***Attempts to promote research***

- Enquiry to Nuffield Foundation
- Science Council Diana Garnham's advice
  - Approach researchers directly, e.g. research institutes, Ph D students, undergraduate dissertations
- Letter to Vice-Chancellors
  - 5 replies from 125 all negative
  - Claim no funding available

### ***What next?***

- Challenge the Research Councils?
- Possible new project
  - "Metric Conversion Bill". For this we would need to find a sympathetic MP to sponsor it.
  - Could we appeal to members to tell us if they know of a retiring MP who is sympathetic to metrication - esp if they are Labour?
  - A list of retiring MPs can be found at ;  
<http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/guide/retiring-mps>

## **3 - Role of stakeholders**

### ***Why stakeholders?***

Who are the stakeholders?

- Enforcers
  - Trading Standards Institute
  - Local Government Association/LACORS
- Consumer groups
  - Consumers Association ("Which?")
  - Consumer Focus
- Industry
  - CBI
  - Retailers
  - Pub industry (also CAMRA)
  - Market traders
- Scientists
  - Research Councils
  - Parliamentary and Scientific Committee

Trading Standards Institute

- Failed to raise metrication in 2007 consultation
- Correspondence with CX (Ron Gainsford)
- Blog article "TSI cops out" - and reaction (Mar 08)
- Letter and article in T5 Today (Oct 08)
- Lord Howe's article (Jan 09)
- TSI confirms policy of "neutrality" BUT - debate may not be over

Consumers Association ("Which?")

- In 1978 supported metrication
- Now refuses to become involved
- Pleads no evidence of detriment
- Low priority for resources but has also said it considers it "political"
- Correspondence with Chairman (Robert Pickard) - finally agreed to put issue to Council

### **Vacancy on Committee**

Owing to the emigration to Canada of John Frewen-Lord, there is now a vacancy on the UKMA Committee.

The role involves, as a minimum, participating in about 10 - 12 telephone conference calls per year to discuss UKMA business, authorising expenditure and making policy decisions.

In addition, Committee members may volunteer to take on specific additional tasks.

The Committee has power to co-opt or hold a by-election, so if any member is prepared to serve, please contact the Secretary.

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### **Consumers' Association**

In response to discussion at the AGM, the Chairman has agreed to stand for the CA Council. His nomination papers have been submitted and include the following "candidate's statement"

Assuming that there are more candidates than vacancies, there will be a ballot in December.

#### **CA candidate's statement, 2009 – Robin Paice**

"CA should devote more effort to advocating basic consumer rights – rather than evaluating latest gadgets - including:

- campaigning against misleading advertising and deceptive packaging
- publicising and explaining the little understood concept of unit pricing
- responding effectively to Government consultations and decisions on consumer issues

Above all CA should support the principle that consumers are best served by a single, rational system of weights and measures, understood and used by all, including in advertising and product description, and enforced in a firm and proportionate manner.

Being unencumbered by other jobs, I shall be fully committed to CA duties."

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### **Pricing of VBM and MSA.**

It has been decided to make both reports available free of charge for internet downloads (or a free CD-Rom if preferred).

If you want a hard copy of VBM, this costs £2.50 for postage and packing. No hard copies of MSA available.

To download or order, go to <http://www.ukma.org.uk/books/ordering.aspx>.

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### **Traffic Signs Review produces INACTION plan**

A presentation at the AGM by Martin Ward

The Transport Department's current review of traffic signs has so far avoided any mention of the "m" word and is likely to be a failure. UKMA has therefore produced its own proposals.

Last September the then Transport Minister, Rosie Winterton, announced "the biggest review of British road signs for 40 years", which she claimed would "consider all aspects of road signing", including safety, efficiency, cost, the environment and the "street clutter" caused by unnecessarily large and complex signs. The first result of this review, which was published in May, is extremely disappointing.

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The draft “action plan” of this review, which might be better described as an “inaction plan”, fails to deal with the following key issues:

- the huge increase in international traffic, with 3 million visiting drivers unable to understand British road signs
- the use of long-winded verbal instructions rather than easily understood picture signs
- the increasing cost of bridge strikes - often attributable to foreign drivers not understanding height and width restrictions in feet and inches
- disregard of the international standards laid down by the Vienna Convention on Road Signs and Signals (which the UK is signed up to).

In response UKMA has produced its own proposals for addressing these problems. These are summarised in a new leaflet “Traffic Signs 2.0”

(free copies can be obtained from the UKMA Secretary).



The proposed new signs, which use exclusively metric units, remove the need to be familiar with two systems of measurement, are clearer and simpler than current cluttered signs, and will reduce the number of language-specific signs on our roads.

**Some examples of the improved signage proposed by UKMA are given below.**

Current cluttered signs



Clear metric signs



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Current cluttered signs



Clear metric signs



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The last major review of traffic signs took place in the 1960s in response to the Vienna Convention on Road Signs and Signals. This is an international treaty designed to increase road safety and aid international road traffic by standardising the signing system for road traffic (road signs, traffic lights and road markings) in use internationally. (Incidentally it has nothing to do with the European Union).

Note: in 2006 UKMA produced a comprehensive case ("Metric signs ahead") for converting traffic signs to metric units. The DfT attempted to close down discussion of the issue by producing grossly exaggerated cost figures and claiming that UKMA's proposals would be "a waste of taxpayers' money". The absurdity of the DfT's figures can be gauged by comparing the DfT's claimed cost of £1200-1400 per sign with the actual cost of £100 per sign when the Irish Republic converted its speed limit signs in 2005.

### **Robin Paice, UKMA chairman said**

"It would appear from reading the review's initial Draft Action Plan, that major safety issues, which are costing the country millions of pounds each year, have so far been overlooked. We believe that the practical solutions proposed in our leaflet, which also addresses issues of signage clutter, and the use of standard symbols, should be properly considered by the DfT's Steering Group. What would be unforgivable would be if the DfT were to make changes to road signs now - only to have to do it all again when they inevitably have to be converted to metric units in a few years time. That really would be a waste of taxpayers' money.

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## **"What's the point of standards?"**

Standards are determined, and their usage agreed, in order to aid communication, reduce costs and simply to make life easier. Of course the opposite is often applauded to define cultural differences, flair, entrepreneurial value, etc.

The excellent UKMA website states "As a result of international agreement standard symbols have been defined for metric units regardless of language. Thus kilometre is written as " km " in all languages (using the Roman alphabet) even though the full word is spelt differently for example".

The BBC seems to have a different view however, judging by this reply received regarding the use of kph on the weather website ...

*Thanks for your e-mail about BBC Weather.*

*I understand you have concerns with regards to the abbreviation shown for 'kilometres per hour' which you feel should be shown as km/h rather than kph.*

*kph and kmph are abbreviations which can also be used and would be known as less formal or 'colloquial' versions.*

*However, I do appreciate the time taken to provide this feedback and as such your comments have been fully registered on our audience log. This log is made available to all members of the BBC, including BBC Weather and senior BBC management.*

*Feedback of this nature helps us when making decisions about future BBC reports and your comment will play a part in this process.*

*Thanks again for taking the time to contact us.*

So kph and kmph can also be used. Who says? Why? Indeed, who decides?

Perhaps it is too difficult to find out what should be used (though linking to the UKMA website couldn't be easier!)

In this particular case, however, anyone who drives a motor vehicle would see a km/h symbol on the secondary scale of their speedometer, but then does anyone look?

Furthermore, when is a less formal or 'colloquial' version acceptable. Is it then a standard?

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### Someone is listening at the RAC however:

(edited from Google groups submission by John Jones)

Hi John,

Good spot! Thanks for that, we are in the process of rebuilding the site and I'll put this as a change request. Again, thanks very much.

Best regards,

Alec Saiko

RAC Digital Marketing Consultant

Details of Submission:

*Hello, I am not a member but I was looking at the advice you provide about driving in European countries - all very useful.*

*Could I point out one thing about speed limits? The symbol for kilometres per hour is km/h, not kph. You might like to consider correcting that when you next update your site. Best wishes.*

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## US going backwards?

From the May-June edition of the USMA'S Metric Today :

A stretch of Interstate 1-9 in Arizona is losing its kilometer signs. The Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) had previously said that the signs would go back to miles when they needed to be replaced, and that time has come: The Arizona State Transportation Board approved a \$1.5 million project on 3 March 2009 to replace the 30-year-old signs on the stretch of I 19 from the Mexican border to I-10 in Tucson. Both the kilometer posts and the large signs giving distances in



kilometers will be replaced. The signs were originally installed in May 1979.

At the time, John Donnelly of the U.S. Metric Board explained that the 107-kilometer-long I-19 was selected for the metric-signage experiment "because it's a relatively isolated stretch near the Mexican border" with no major intersecting roads, just heavy traffic to and from Mexico, which had been metric for years. The only non-metric signs were speed limits and bridge heights.

ADOT Public Relations Officer Linda Ritter said the retreat to U.S. customary units is being sought because of motorist confusion and also because of the diminished reflectivity of the signs due to age.

### However, from the issue of Metric Today:

In mid-May the Arizona governor's office announced its decision to delay the replacement of metric signs on I-19, pending further research on the project's effects on the local business community. "We heard a lot of opposition from the GVCCC [Green Valley Community Coordinating Council] and the leadership in Green Valley, and the governor decided to hold off on the project for now," according to Tim Bee of the governor's office in Tucson.

Some opponents would prefer to spend the money on repaving rather than re-signing; some object to costs incurred by businesses if exits are renumbered to use mile markers rather than kilometer markers; and some object to losing "an homage to the culture of the area."

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The governor's office says the signs will have to be replaced eventually because they don't meet reflectivity standards, but replacement signs could remain in kilometers, reversing an earlier decision based on a state law that requires all road signs in Arizona to use the same standard of measurement. That law, it turns out, doesn't apply to already existing signs.

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### **Promoting the Metric System for U.S. Economic Growth**

From the Sept–Oct edition of the USMA'S Metric Today :

On 6 July 2009 the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) released the results of its work on the U.S.-Japan Regulatory Reform and Competition Policy Initiative. As the USTR puts it, the initiative "serves as a key bilateral forum for both Governments to promote economic growth through regulatory reform.

The resulting 86-page report has two major parts, "Regulatory Reform and Other Measures by the Government of Japan" and "Regulatory Reform and Other Measures by the Government of the United States." One section of the latter part covers the U.S. response to **Japan's concerns about U.S. acceptance of the metric system.**

#### **Part of that section:**

Promotion of the Metric System

1. The U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) reaffirms the significance of metric system use in the United States and it actively promotes the voluntary adoption and benefits of the metric system in trade and commerce within the United States with the intention of continuing efforts. NIST works with the U.S. Metric Association (a private sector organization) and other partners to provide public information through websites and other tools, outreach efforts, and responds [to] inquiries annually to educate industry and the public.
2. Metric units [on labels that don't also include non-metric units] are permitted in 96 percent of U.S. states on packages subject to their jurisdiction, including products such as automotive accessories, clothing and wearing apparel, and household furnishings. **Two U.S. states currently have legal prohibitions against metric[-only] labeling. One of the states, New York, is engaged in the regulatory process to allow metric[-only] labeling.** NIST, along with other organizations, continues to work with the remaining state, **Alabama**, to remove legal prohibitions against metric[-only] labeling.
3. Amending the federal Fair Packaging and Labeling Act (FPLA) is a priority of the NIST Metric Program. NIST continues to work towards building U.S. industry support for Congressional action to modify the law to permit metric[-only] labeling.
4. Expanding use of the metric system is anticipated as new technologies enter the U.S. marketplace. For example, the U.S. National Work Group for the Development of Commercial Hydrogen Measurement Standards—Fuel Specification Subcommittee has proposed hydrogen fuel method of sale based on metric units (kilogram and pascal) in commercial sales and on street signs. If implemented, the U.S. approach would be consistent with the global hydrogen marketplace.
5. U.S. healthcare institutions are increasingly switching to exclusive SI measurements for patient care to lower the potential for patient safety errors and increase patient care quality. The Joint Commission issued an alert in 2008 to member organizations to weigh pediatric patients in kilograms to reduce medical errors.

### Subscriptions

From Tony Wilson, Treasurer

Thank you to all those who have either renewed their UKMA membership subscription already, or have joined as life members.

Other members are reminded that subscriptions for the year from June 2009 to June 2010 are now due. At the AGM it was agreed to keep subscriptions for 2009/10 at their previous rates, which are:

- Individual £15
- Concession £5
- Life £150

Subscriptions can be paid in any of the following ways (the first two being free of charges to UKMA):

1. By bank transfer directly to UKMA's account (60-05-16, 16440846), using online or telephone banking
2. By cheque, payable to UK Metric Association, sent to the treasurer at:  
Tony Wilson, 1 Isambard Place, London, SE16 7DA
3. By PayPal, following the link on this page:  
[http://www.metric.org.uk/your\\_role/Donations.aspx](http://www.metric.org.uk/your_role/Donations.aspx)
4. By Moneybookers account, quoting the recipient as treasurer@metric.org.uk

UKMA can receive standing orders direct from bank accounts if you wish to set up an annual standing order to ensure your subscriptions are paid on time.

Please continue to support UKMA by renewing your subscription for the current year if you have not already done so; please ensure that your payment is made by the end of September to ensure you continue to enjoy the benefits of membership.

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### Graphics showing non-standard metric symbols

***Another example of lack of usage of standard metric symbols from David Brown:***



MAX. HEADROOM 3795 MTS

What's (where's) the point in this?

***Here is an item from the Screwfix catalogue:***

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**Acrylic Eggshell**  
 2.5Ltr. Low odour, quick drying. 10 x tougher than conventional emulsion. Easy to clean finish. Covers approx. 11m<sup>2</sup>/Ltr.



**Leyland Trade**

**ONLY**  
**£14.99** Each  
 £13.03 Ex-VAT

Size	Net Price Inc. VAT
Quote	Each

11m<sup>2</sup>/Ltr.

Excellent use of m<sup>2</sup>, shame about the use of Ltr.

2.5Ltr.

Another use of Ltr. At least the use of Ltr. is consistent.

The use of Ltr. by Screwfix may be because the person responsible for layout is unaware of the permissible use of the capital L for litre. Of course, other multiples, or sub-multiples should follow suit in the same context, i.e. mL, cL, etc.

What do members think of this 'option' ?