Ag Inspectors Use WINWAM to Stop Potential Flimflam

Consumer protection inspectors are now armed with the latest computer technology to help prevent under filling or over charging at the checkout stand. The new weapon is an 8 by 12-inch laptop computer loaded with the WINWAM software program designed by the New Jersey company, Nover, Engelstein and Associates. WINWAM stands for Windows Weights and Measures.

"This new program will help our inspectors speed up our on-site inspection process, all the while keeping excellent historical data on the merchants we visit," said Kyle Stephens, director of the Division of Regulatory Services.

Stephens oversees the Weights and Measures program for the Department of Agriculture and Food. The program is responsible for monitoring the accuracy of thousands of measuring devices and packaging practices used in commerce in Utah; such as retail check out scanners, gasoline pumps, gasoline octane levels, food packaging, and more. The division also works to ensure accurate labeling and that food safety laws are enforced.

To increase inspection accuracy, the division went high-tech recently with the addition of the WINWAM program. The program is also used in 15 other states and numerous municipal inspection systems in the U.S. The program performs all of the calculations that were once done manually by field inspectors.

"This adds an excellent level of confidence and speed to the monitoring we do in the field," Stephens said. In the past, inspectors made manual calculations using older calculators.

Now inspectors plug their data into the WINWAM program that can do numerous complicated calculations instantly. It is especially valuable when dealing with repetitive calculations that are often time consuming and mundane. It helps eliminate possible errors.

The program can also alert inspectors when it is time to perform inspections at certain businesses. An inspector will tell the computer where she will be working, and the computer can notify her which businesses are due for visits.

"This enhances my ability to generate a variety of different reports and helps me better manage information and resources," said Stephens.

The WINWAM program will speed up retail store scanner inspections. Inspectors can carry the laptop around with them in the stores, scanning shelf prices directly into the computer. Those

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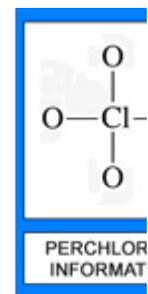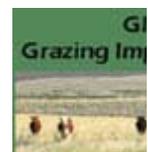
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prices will then be compared with what the checkout scanner would charge for them. This is another way the state works to keep checkout scanner accuracy above 98 percent.

The computer can also tell if consumers are paying more than they should at the meat counter. With the use of a plug-in electronic scale-and some pre-set tolerances for packaging weigh--the computer can tell if consumers are being charged for any of the packaging.

Another benefit is that the computer can keep a historical record of what devices are accurate and which ones are not. "If you have a situation where a gas pump continually under fills that gallon of gas you are paying for, then we have a record of it," Stephens says. "And that information comes in handy when we conduct our enforcement hearings," he adds.

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