



National Conference on Weights and Measures
"That Equity May Prevail"

2010 Chairman's Address

Randy Jennings | Tennessee Department of Agriculture

Good morning; I am honored to have this opportunity to speak to you as Chairman of the 95th Annual Meeting of the National Conference on Weights and Measures.

The past year has once again been eventful for the NCWM, and certainly challenging for me as Chairman. Some of those challenges came at me a bit quicker than I would have wished for. As I was making my New Chairman's Address at the close of our meetings last year, little did I know that during those very moments I was receiving e-mails from a minority alliance of concerned NCWM stakeholders advising me that the direction the NCWM was moving in was fundamentally flawed, and that I was now personally liable for taking any and all correction actions necessary to avoid further consequences. I don't have to say, these were not the "Congratulations" messages that I was hoping for as I scrolled through messages while waiting at the airport for my flight back home. Looking back, I should not have been surprised that my term would begin with something controversial to manage, as I cannot recall a period in our recent history that has permitted any of the NCWM officers to slow down. Having said that; I will begin by pointing out a few of the more significant accomplishments that the organization has made this year.

We had a complete and successful launch of phase one of the Verified Conformity Assessment Program (VCAP) component of the National Type Evaluation Program (NTEP). With this step forward, NTEP has now officially integrated a "production meets type" component to the program. As you know by now, phase one is focused on load cells, with the strategy remaining to expand the program in the future to other devices that are subject to influence factors. To date approximately 15 VCAP audits, representing the majority of load cell certificate holders, have been submitted to NTEP for review. The audits have taken place at manufacturing facilities located in the U.S., Israel, Sri Lanka, and China. Many sets of eyes are evaluating our success in this program, as we are most certainly leading the legal metrology world in the area of device conformity assessment. I want to take this opportunity to thank our NTEP Administrator, Jim Truex, and NTEP Committee Chair Judy Cardin for their efforts in moving this program forward in a very professional manner.

I am also pleased to say that the Board of Directors has approved the implementation of an online canvassing system that will be used annually to gather stakeholder input on all items that are on the agenda in Publication 16. Every member of the NCWM will have the opportunity to log into the system, review items of interest, and enter an initial position along with any qualifying statements or supporting data. This web based initiative will substantially



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reduce barriers for participation in the standardization process, and provide Standing Committees and Task Groups with untapped resources that exist within our broad membership base. This tool is not intended to replace the dialogue that exists as a product of our open hearing process — conversely, it is anticipated that this will enhance that process by receiving additional input that can be fully vetted in the open hearing and voting process that is the hallmark of our Annual Meeting. I applaud the Board for embracing this new program, and look forward to this application becoming an integral component in our pursuit of developing standards using a consensus building process.

This year we also took a very close look at our Standing Committee structures in an effort to ensure that the workloads being placed on the committees were at a reasonable level. This process began with a concept of splitting the S&T Committee into two separate Standing Committees: One for weighing and one for measuring devices. Other options, such as creating Subcommittees for weighing and measuring that would report to the Standing Committees were also considered. Steve Malone, Mark Coyne, and Carol Hockert worked together to evaluate the past workloads of the standing committees, review the format for our meetings, and essentially to uncover any reasonable approaches for either spreading out the workload or providing more time during normal business hours for the committees to work. Based on their reports to the board, coupled with the feedback that was received during the open hearing process, it was determined that the best path forward at this time would be to encourage the Standing Committee Chairmen to take complete advantage of options such as forming Task Groups that will focus on Developing and Informational Items. I am encouraged to see that the Standing Committees have recently formed two important Task Groups: A group for Price Posting and Computing Capability and Requirements for Retail Motor-Fuel Dispensers chaired by Jeff Humphreys and vice-chaired by Fran Elson-Houston and a Printer and Toner Cartridge group led by Vicky Dempsey. I am confident that this will expedite the review process for these items, and at the same time reduce the time that otherwise would be required by the Standing Committees to guide these items down the correct path.

There were numerous other initiatives undertaken this year, but in the interest of time, I will not elaborate further. However, I do want to briefly point out the incredible work that has been done by the Professional Development Committee on the National Certification Program that will be officially launched very soon. Ross Anderson and his team have performed beyond expectations and the value that this program will add to our organization over the years cannot yet be fully appreciated. I also want to recognize Lindsay Hier of NCWM staff for doing a terrific job launching the new NCWM website, and recently setting up a portal to capture Initial Verification inspection data that has the potential to benefit all of our stakeholders. This behind the scenes work is very crucial to our image as well as our functionality.



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Having had my opportunity to talk a bit about this past year, I'll move to my perspective on the future of weights and measures. Looking back at addresses given by past Chairmen, I see a common word that almost always plays a central theme: Change. Woodrow Wilson said, "If you want to make enemies, try to change something." On the other hand, Winston Churchill took the approach that "There is nothing wrong with change, if it is in the right direction." I think both of these statesmen were on target with their quips and both complimented one another. I can make that assessment honestly as a result of being part of many changes in this organization since joining the Board of Directors in 2006. Along the way we may have ruffled a few feathers, but I think that we have ultimately gone in the right direction.

But regardless of the changes and advancements that we have made in recent years, I believe that we will have to continue the quest of change in order to persist as an organization that is responsible for producing technically sound standards in a timely manner that meet society's current needs. This pursuit of open mindedness for change is the essential basis for the theme that I selected for this year, "Breaking Molds to Shape the Future."

I'm sure that everyone will agree that the NCWM is only as strong as our participating members. While we have maintained a strong overall membership base despite the struggling economy, it is the ability for our members to actively participate in the standards setting process that is of most concern to me. State and local governments, as well as many industry sectors, are facing revenue shortfall issues that are dramatically impacting their organizations. This directly affects our members' ability to take part in the traditional NCWM process. The issues that are coming before us are increasingly complex, and when new standards are accepted and published, both regulatory official and industry management that were not a part of the process find it difficult to both enforce and comply with those rules.

So, what can the NCWM do now to shape the future for weights and measures? I believe that we must continue to look for ways to utilize technology to encourage member participation in the standards development process. I mentioned earlier that two task groups working under the Standing Committees have been formed. We have to promote support for the Conference in this manner, not only to provide for a manageable Standing Committee workload, but to bring more stakeholders directly into the process. These Task Groups can be formed with web based meetings as the central method for conducting business, reducing the need for travel. Managed correctly, this can be a very effective way for us to achieve many of our goals. We also need to begin to investigate new methods for training weights and measures officials. The NIST Weights and Measures Division has traditionally provided high quality training for inspectors and technicians; however, it is becoming increasingly difficult for many jurisdictions to participate due to the inherent costs. State-of-the-art web based



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training modules have been discussed and are used in some industry sectors. The NCWM will have to play a central role along with our NIST and industry partners to make this an option for weights and measures. It would not happen overnight, but if we begin and continue to pursue this concept, the effort will reap many rewards. I also believe that there will be a time when the organization will have to reevaluate the voting system that is currently in use. I am not suggesting that anything should replace the actual meetings that are necessary to make final determinations, but there are alternatives that can ensure that a quorum will always be met, and at some point we will have to be able to discuss those options with an open mind.

And finally I will ask, what do we do at home with our programs to prepare for the future? Many Weights and Measures managers are struggling to maintain their programs at a level that will provide adequate protection for both the consumer and competing industry. For years we have been asked to do more with less. The new trend seems to be to significantly reduce or eliminate inspection activities that are considered to provide the least benefit to consumers and concentrate on the most high profile programs. This afternoon you will have the opportunity to see a presentation on Risk Based Inspection Schemes. Many of us have already implemented this approach into components of our programs, and it can offer an attractive option to the alternative when developed with the aid of statisticians and historical data. Additionally, as the NCWM rolls out new initiatives designed to solicit your participation by providing input mechanisms, certification testing, and training, I encourage you to embrace those tools as a new way of achieving your goals and contributing to the future of both your programs and the NCWM. We are most certainly facing challenging times, but we will find the solutions that will ultimately lead to even greater uniformity and equity in the marketplace.

In closing, I will say that I am confident that we will witness new and exciting steps forward within our organization in the coming years, and that will all be due to the many hours of dedicated service and cooperation between our volunteer members, officers, our friends at Measurement Canada, the Associate Membership, and of course the support staff at both the NIST Weights and Measures Division and the NCWM central office. It truly takes a team effort to keep this organization moving onward. I have been fortunate to be surrounded by a gifted group of individuals that have helped to keep us on the right path, and it is comforting to know that this room is full of talented people that will be there for us in the future.

Serving as Chairman of the NCWM is a true honor. Thank you all for your support and for providing me with this very special privilege this year.