

ANSWERS TO A FEW QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE ABOUT U.S. METRIC CONVERSION

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Q: *We have a perfectly good measuring system, so why does the USA have to change to using the metric system?*

A: We are living in a metric world where just about every country, except the USA, uses the metric system. Other countries are now telling us that they don't want to buy any of the products manufactured by U.S. companies if they aren't manufactured and labeled in metric units. The European Union (EU) countries, which have been good customers of U.S. companies, now tell us that, after 2009, they won't allow products into their countries unless they are labeled in metric units. We must operate in the world marketplace, and we can't stay competitive if we don't provide metrically labeled goods. With about 99% of the rest of the world using metric, there is no chance we can persuade them to use our inches and pounds.

Q: *Why do we have to sell to other countries?*

A: Our own population cannot absorb all the products our industries produce. Our companies need to sell outside the U.S. to stay in business and keep U.S. residents in their jobs. If we lose foreign customers we lose jobs and our economy weakens. *But*, maintaining a strong export market means we must meet the requirements of our foreign customers who want metric products. We buy billions of dollars worth of foreign metric products (sending U.S. money overseas) and our citizens are using them with no problem, so why resist going metric?

Q: *Why can't companies make inch-pound products to sell here and make metric products to sell outside the U.S.?*

A: It's *cheaper* for companies to make products with one set of units and sell them to all customers. Sizing products with two different measurement systems would raise *your* costs for buying inch-pound products and also raise the price of the metric-labeled products so foreign customers won't buy them.

A manufacturer's expenses really increase when two production lines must be run (one for inch-pound and the other for metric products). Metric and inch tools, machinery, and parts must be kept separated, must be stored and inventoried, thus adding to the cost of product manufacture. There are additional costs for record keeping, warehouse space, and other factors, such as mixing orders so non-metric products might accidentally be sent to metric countries. There also is a good chance of workers' accidentally mixing up metric and inch-pound parts so products must be scrapped. All this adds to the price *you pay* for a product.

Q: *How can those who are too old to learn a new measurement system expect to keep their jobs? I've always had problems with arithmetic, anyway.*

A: If you're smart enough to hold down a job, you should have no problems. Even the illiterate curbside traders in India learned (years ago, when that country converted) to use the metric units . . . and they learned the everyday metric units in a matter of hours. The key to learning to use the units of the modern metric system known as SI (for **S**ystem of **I**nternational Units) is to forget the inch-pound units and not attempt to convert back and forth. You don't need arithmetic. In fact, if you try to use arithmetic, you're learning metric system usage the *hard* way.

Q: *How can I remember the metric units?*

A: Find a familiar object that is about the size of each metric unit you want to learn. Then practice until, *each* time a metric unit is mentioned, you get a mental image of the familiar object that is about the size of that metric unit. For example, the millimeter is a tiny unit that replaces fractions of inches. Its length is the size of the thickness of a dime. Each time you hear the word, millimeter, think: *the thickness of a dime*. If someone mentions an item is 10 millimeters long, just imagine how high a stack of 10 dimes would be to get an idea of that item's length. If 20 millimeters is mentioned, think of the height of a stack of 20 dimes. Of course, if you need an exact measurement, you'll get a metric ruler to find the precise length.

Use a similar method to learn the 6 to 8 everyday metric units you'll need to learn, and you'll soon be "thinking metric" which is the objective of your efforts. The sketches on free fliers USMA distributes (and on our Web site: www.metric.org) will help you.

Modern technology is making this a smaller world where better communication is required. Just as English is the worldwide language of business, the metric system is the world's common language of measurement, and it is to the advantage of our industries, our government, and our consumers to adopt the world's measurement language: the SI version of the metric system.

NOTE: The spelling used most commonly in the United States is meter and liter. However, the alternate spellings are metre and litre. Both the -er and -re endings are correct. Also, the short form (called a "symbol") for liter is a capital el (L) in the U.S.; but a lowercase el (l) also is correct and is used in many foreign countries.