

PRESS RELEASE

18 September 2019

For immediate release

‘Money for Money’s Worth?’ - £Billions worth of consumer spending underpinned by the work of Trading Standards in Scotland.

One of Scotland’s basic consumer rights is the right to buy goods, and for those goods to be fairly and accurately weighed or measured by the seller. Local council Trading Standards services provide confidence in the long-established UK system of measurement that is the most basic and essential element in any transaction – money for money’s worth.

One of the most invisible systems of consumer protection is weights and measures, and the laws apply to almost all goods that are sold, ranging from foodstuffs, to petrol and alcohol, and even household furnishings whether by capacity, weight, or length. Even medical weighing is included so that correct amounts of medicine can be administered at hospitals and health centres. A 2014/15 national project found a non-compliance rate of 23%, with equipment being found unsuitable for patient weighing requirements. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/medical-weighing-project-2014-to-2015-final-report>

Trading Standards Officers check local equipment to ensure that accuracy is maintained, and large capacity equipment such as weighbridges up to 50 tonne capacity are also checked, protecting business as well as consumers. As an example of the value of this small area of the work, there are around 1200 weighbridges in Scotland in use for trade with an estimated 8 million weighings a year across the country. Accuracy of equipment ensures confidence business to business, for import/export, and even for landfill tax! Baggage weighers at airports are also checked to make sure consumers’ holidays are not spoiled by overcharging by airlines.

Appended below are a selection of examples of short weight prepacked food found during a recent supermarket project. Consumers being ripped off by even smallish amounts per transaction, does lead to huge amounts of financial consumer detriment when aggregated across Scotland, and significant extra profit for business.

SCOTSS Chair and Trading Standards Manager for Dumfries & Galloway Council, Sandra Harkness said:

“Weights and Measures is the earliest form of consumer protection, and it is disappointing in this age of technology that consumers are still losing out when businesses do not take sufficient care when weighing or measuring goods. Trading Standards Officers across Scotland are happy to advise and educate business but will take enforcement action where consumers are being ripped off.”

Scottish TS Week takes place 16-20 September 2019. Follow @socotss on Twitter for full updates and follow #ScottishTSweek2019 for updates from across Scotland.

www.tradingstandards.scot

ENDS

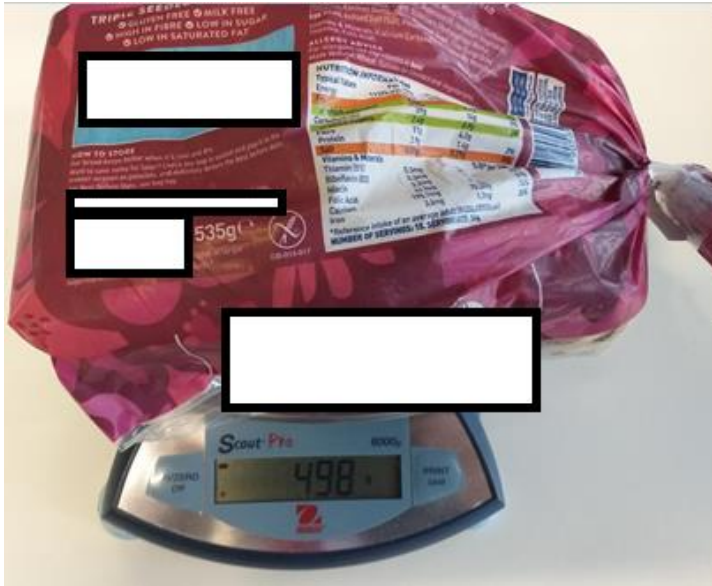
Notes for Editors:

For press queries, email coordinator@scotss.org.uk

1. The Society of Chief Officers of Trading Standards in Scotland (SCOTSS) represents the 31 local authority Trading Standards services in Scotland. SCOTSS was established in 1996 and helps support and coordinate the activities of Scotland local authority trading standards teams. It is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC047951 and works closely with other governmental and regulatory organisations, such as the Competition & Markets Authority, and
2. Trading Standards Officers in Scottish councils advise on and enforce laws that govern the way we buy, sell, rent and hire goods and services. Local authorities carry out inspections and monitor or investigate complaints, they work with businesses to help achieve compliance but ultimately, can instigate prosecutions against those who break the law.
3. Weights and Measures activities are being carried out all week across Scotland, from petrol forecourt checks, to heavy weighbridge checks in Aberdeen. Many councils are offering free weighings to consumers, contact your local council to find out.
4. Anyone with information about shops selling short measure can report it anonymously through Advice Direct Scotland on 0808 164 6000 www.consumeradvice.scot or to their local Trading Standards authority <https://www.tradingstandards.uk/consumers/support-advice>

Shortweight examples

Gluten free bread



2 loaves of gluten free bread found on sale at a supermarket were found to be short weight. The 535g loaves were found to have actual net weights of just 492g and 497g. At £3 per pack, and a unit price of £5.60/kg, this equates to a loss to consumers of up to 24p per pack.

With around 2500 stores nationwide, selling 1 loaf per day, this equates to an estimated collective consumer detriment of £600 per day, or £219,000 per year.

Ready meal



Shortweight Haggis, Neeps & Tatties ready meals were found on sale in a supermarket. The 400g packs were found to have net weights of as little as 353g, a deficiency of 47g or almost 12%.

At £1.59 per pack

this represents a loss to consumers of up to 19p per pack.

With this pack being stocked in up to 760 stores nationwide, a sale of 1 pack per store per day equates to an estimated collective consumer detriment could be as much as £1,444 per day, or £527,060 per year.

Strawberries



A pack of supermarket own-brand strawberries was found to be excessively shortweight during a recent inspection visit. The 350g declared pack had an actual gross weight of 319g when it is an offence for any pack of this size to be on the market with a net weight lower than 329g.

Butter

Packs of butter on sale at a large supermarket were found to have deficiencies of around 12%. The 200g declared blocks had net weights of as low as 177g. At £3 per pack this deficiency equates to a loss to consumers of 34.5p per pack.

The total number of packs from this batch was 1251. Total consumer collective detriment could

therefore have been as much as £431. At a deficiency of up to 23g, this represents a gain to the packer of 28773g of butter, or just short of 144 packs.



beef Joints



2 packs of supermarket own-brand beef roasting joints were found to be shortweight by as much as 149g.

One pack declared as having a net weight of 1170g had an actual gross weight of 1021g – a 13% deficiency.

At £11.99/kg, this deficiency was a loss to consumers (and a gain to the supermarket) of £1.79 per pack. If only 1 pack was sold at each of this supermarkets' stores throughout the country each day, the total collective consumer detriment could be as much as £1867 per day, or £681,455 per year.

Peppercorns



A pack of peppercorns being sold as 110g was found to have an actual gross weight of just 75g – a 32% deficiency.

Packers project example (2016/17)

16 premises across Renfrewshire were visited to assess compliance with the Packaged Goods Regulations. A total of 513 individual packs were checked across 76 product lines. 105 packs were found to be non-compliant, 92 of these were found to be below T2, representing a failure rate of 18%.

- 9 packs of locally produced tablet with a declared weight of 85g were found to be below the legal tolerance (76g). Found on sale in a national supermarket, deficiencies were as great as 23%, with the lowest weight found to be 65.6g.
- 6 packs of chestnuts on sale at a national supermarket were found to be below the legal tolerance. The 500g packs were found to have weights as low as 429g.
- 2660 packs of cinder toffee have been withdrawn from sale by a national retailer. All packs were found to have been packed below the legal tolerance (232g) of the declared weight of 250g. The lowest weight was recorded as 200.9g gross, with the average deficiency being 38.8g (15.5%). At £3.49 a pack, the withdrawal affects stock with a total sales value of £9,283.40. It is thought 1317 affected packs had already been sold to consumers, representing average collective detriment of £712 to consumers.
- 750g packs of plums on sale at a national supermarket were found to be below the declared weight. The lowest pack was 695.2g at gross when no packs are allowed to be below 720g.
- Beef lorne sausage packed by the same packer for 2 national supermarkets with a declared weight of 280g had packs as low as 220g (21% deficient). A total of 35 packs out of 87 checked were below the legal tolerance (262g).
- Brie packed instore at a national supermarket was found to be deficient by as much as 30%. One pack labelled as 305g weighed just 215g at gross. At a unit price of £8/kg this equates to a loss to consumers of £2.40/kg
- 1kg packs of satsumas on sale at a local retailer. All packs were below the legal tolerance (970g) with the lowest weight recorded as 903g.

Ongoing checks on packaged goods

(1)

A supermarket chain has taken the decision to withdraw a range of its own brand camembert cheese following the discovery of short weight packs by Trading Standards Officers at Renfrewshire Council.

During inspection visits to two outlets in Renfrewshire, officers identified packs of the 250g product with net weights below the legal tolerance. One pack was found to be deficient by **10%**, representing a loss to consumers, and an unfair commercial gain for the business, of **26p** per pack.

As a result of further investigations the supermarket and the UK importer of the product took the decision to withdraw a total of **49,158 packs** with a total retail value of **£132,235**.

The potential collective detriment to consumers that has been removed as a result of this investigation is **1,194.5kg** of cheese, equivalent to **4778** packs, worth a total of **£12,781.57**.

(2)

Packs of olives made up in the instore deli of a national supermarket were found to be short weight having failed to take account of the tare weight. The packs ranged in size from 100g up to 250g and each was deficient by up to 20g, resulting in deficiencies of between 8% and 20%. At a unit price of £1.10/100g, a 20g deficiency equates to a 22p per pack detriment to consumers.

(3)

Supermarket own-brand camembert cheese with a declared weight of 250g was found to weigh 227.2g net. T2 for this packs size is 232g. Each pack costs £2.85 giving a unit price of £1.14 per 100g.

At 4.8g below T2, this represents a loss to consumers of **5.5p per pack**, when taken as the deficiency below the legal tolerance.

However, when applied as a loss to consumers from the declared weight of 250g, what the average consumer will be expecting to receive, this represents a loss to consumers of **22.8g or 26p per pack**.

With 1035 stores across the UK, if each store sells just 1 pack a day this is a total of **377,775** packs per year, worth a total of **£1,076,658.75** in sales.

At a consumer detriment level of 5.5p per pack this equates to a total collective consumer detriment of **£20,778**. However, at a detriment level of 26p per pack the collective consumer detriment is **£98,221.5**