

APPENDIX D

REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON INFORMATION SYSTEMS

The Task Force met in Sacramento, California for a one-day meeting on April 17, 1986, and also on Sunday afternoon prior to the 71st annual meeting of the NCWM. As a consequence of the April meeting, the Task Force focused its activities in two areas.

One activity was to pursue development of a weights and measures "electronic bulletin board". It was felt that this project could, if successful, provide both short- and long-term benefits to the Conference membership. Short term benefits would include:

- a. an immediate demonstration of practical, computer-based communications between the Office of Weights and Measures (OWM) and the jurisdictions;
- b. providing an enhanced system for rapid transmission of messages between the Conference leadership and OWM irrespective of time zones, office hours kept, etc.; and
- c. an opportunity for jurisdictions to both send and receive timely information concerning weights and measures subjects of general or specific interest.

Long-term benefits of the bulletin board could include:

- a. a means of rapidly sharing significant field inspection data among interested jurisdictions both regionally or nationally;
- b. an expanded capability of the Conference membership to communicate with the Office of Weights and Measures in all subject areas ranging from the Laboratory Auditing Program to handbook updates, training schedules, and useful software programs; and
- c. a time-saving method for communicating, reviewing, and signing off on NCWM committee draft reports, documents, or other Conference business.

The Task Force is pleased to report that through the efforts of our OWM staff advisor, Karl Newell, and the Office of Weights and Measures, the weights and measures "electronic bulletin board" project was successful. The "board" is on line. This "board," called WAMIS (Weights And Measures Information System), is accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by telephone from any member's jurisdiction or member's home equipped with a computer and modem. Use of this system is currently not restricted. It is expected that passwords will later be necessary to access or down-load

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certain information. This system is primarily designed for use by members of the National Conference on Weights and Measures. A full description of the WAMIS "bulletin board" system will be available in August 1986.

The second project of the Task Force, as identified at the April, 1986, meeting, was to develop a model format for the exchange between jurisdictions in electronic form of inspection record data pertaining to standard pack packaged products. The Task Force has since concluded this project was premature and has, instead, chosen to approach the needs of the jurisdictions in computerization from several different directions. A primary tool of the Task Force in its redirected effort to assist the jurisdictions will be use of the WAMIS electronic bulletin board.

To facilitate use of WAMIS by Conference members, all members should read and become familiar with the WAMIS USERS GUIDE. If your jurisdiction has (or has access to) a computer and modem with appropriate communications software, please inform Karl Newell of the NBS-OWM staff. Then, with the appropriate WAMIS telephone number and your presently self-selected password, you can dial up and log on as a "board" user. The bulletin service, messaging and communications (including conferencing) capabilities of the system, are currently "up" and available to all users.

As member jurisdictions gain familiarity with the WAMIS "board", new uses will emerge. The Task Force specifically encourages members to submit, in whatever format is convenient to them, data on results of inspections of noncomplying lots of standard pack packaged products encountered in their jurisdictions. This information will assist other jurisdictions seeking to identify problem areas they may wish to look into, and will also assist the Task Force as it seeks to recommend useful minimum standards for the exchange of inspection data electronically.

Other areas of activity for the Task Force on Information Systems during the coming year include:

- a. developing listings in WAMIS of current weights and measures software applications programs in use by various jurisdictions. Such listings might include categorization by type (laboratory area, device inspection, package inspection, etc.), computer language and operating system, file storage requirements, reporting capabilities, etc.;
- b. studying possible changes in the way the WAMIS is accessed so that members who are geographically remote do not have to consistently bear the highest charges (telephone tolls) to connect with the system based in Gaithersburg, Maryland; and

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- c. studying the security needs of WAMIS as its popularity and use increases. This includes the possible need for a verifiable, NCWM-based password system and related measures to minimize the likelihood of unauthorized access to the board and the information on it.

The Task Force thanks the Conference members who have assisted with the work undertaken so far and seeks the continuing interest, input and support from all those who desire to use computers effectively as tools in weights and measures work.

K. J. Simila, Oregon, Chairman
J. F. Lyles, Virginia
J. Rothleder, California
G. W. Hanson, San Bernadino County, California
R. Bruce, Canada
K. G. Newell, NBS, Staff Advisor