

Issue 73

## Metric System

Why bother changing over to the metric system?

**Advantages:**

1. It's much simpler to use. You change kilometers to centimeters by merely moving a decimal point. If you doubt the ease, try changing miles to inches!
2. It's used in every other nation in the world except Burma, South Yemen, and Brunei. Hence, it's important that our industries use it in manufacturing for export and competition in the world marketplace. General Motors is almost entirely metric.
3. Pharmaceuticals and photographic materials are specified in metric units. Nutrition information shows a strange mixture of metric and U.S. customary units. Many sports events use metric specifications. News of the drug war constantly familiarizes the public with metric mass measures.

**Disadvantages:**

1. The public resists strongly; some people have even organized to fight what they see as a troublesome, even impractical, move. For example, deeds, plats, and blueprints on record for hundreds of years back are all in inches and feet. Consumer advocates warn that a changeover to metric packaging in the marketplace will provide a smokescreen to hide steep price increases.
2. In September 1982, after six years of effort, the federal government gave up exhorting the country and abolished the U.S. Metric Board. The new, much smaller Office of Metric Programs assumes that eventually, perhaps not in your lifetime, enough people will be used to metric measurements so that the change will take place slowly and all by itself.

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3. What metric units do you feel comfortable using already: kilograms, meters, liters? Should stores selling such consumer goods as food, hardware, and clothing be encouraged to use them?
4. Isn't it odd that people are so enthusiastic about learning to use computers, which is much more difficult than learning to use the metric system?
5. While most measurements are being converted into metric units these days, the football field will probably always remain 100 yards long. Not that no one has tried to change it. *Chemistry* magazine ("Drop Back Ten Meters and Punt," Nov. 1977, p. 4) reports an experiment at Carleton College in Minnesota with a field 100 meters long and 50 meters wide (28 feet longer and 14 feet wider than usual). In the experimental game with its rival, St. Olaf, Carleton lost 43-0. It seems that the experiment was abandoned.
6. A metric-based index relates your body mass to your health. You can calculate your own index by dividing your mass in kilograms by the square of your height in meters. For values of the index above 25, there is a steady decrease in your life expectancy and an increase in the likelihood of certain diseases. (*U.S. Metric Association Newsletter*, July-August 1985, p. 7).

(See "Alphabetization: Chinese," p. 128.)

