Canada converts to the metric system

Canada has made significant progress along the road to conversion to the metric system. Although use of that system has been legal in Canada since 1871, long-standing identification with the measuring system of Great Britain tended to confine use of metric units to the scientific area only. The impetus to give primacy to metric measurement began with the publication by the Government of Canada of the *White paper on metric conversion in Canada* in January 1970. Metric Commission Canada, which was set up in 1971 as a result of that white paper, estimated that Canada's conversion would be substantially completed by the end of 1980, and would be marked by a voluntary and cooperative endeavour. By handling conversion on a voluntary basis and spreading it over several years, the commission hoped to keep costs to a minimum by linking changes to normal replacement of machinery and supplies.

In 1974 the National Program of Guideline Dates for Metric Conversion was approved and four distinct phases for conversion set out. Phase One (investigation) was virtually completed in 1975. Eleven steering committees and about 60 sector committees by that time were deciding on policies, objectives and strategies for metric conversion in almost every sector of the economy. Planning, the second phase, progressed during 1975-76, with some sectors entering the third phase, scheduling. The final phase, actual implementation of metric measurement in the various fields of the economy, was already partly under way in a few sectors such as Health and Welfare, Meteorology, Food and Beverages. With implementation expected to peak in 1978, the end of 1980 has been forecast as the guideline date when the economy will be working substantially in metric units.

On a day-to-day basis, Canadians have gradually become exposed to the widening use of metric terms. On April 1, 1975 the daily public weather reports and forecasts announced temperatures in degrees Celsius (the name of the Swedish astronomer who devised the system in 1742). On September 1, 1975 precipitation was measured in millimetres (mm) for rainfall and centimeters (cm) for snowfall. On April 1, 1976 the Atmospheric Environment Service began giving wind speeds in kilometres per hour (km/h), atmospheric pressure in kilopascals (kPa) and distances in kilometres (km).

Since October 1, 1975 water flow, usage and related data have been given in metric units on the St. Lawrence Seaway; the Canadian St. Lawrence Seaway Authority and the United States Seaway Development Corporation are cooperating to ensure that conversion may proceed smoothly.

An increasing number of commercial household products became available in metric dimensions during 1975 and 1976. Canada's sugar refining companies now mark their product in metric-sized packages (1 kg, 2 kg, 4 kg, 10 kg and 40 kg). Clinical thermometers changed over to Celsius in 1975, with normal body temperature of 37°C indicated on the stem. After December 1977 all "new" wine will be bottled in metric sizes. Metric cooking measures standards published by the Canadian Government Specifications Board call for three liquid measures, three dry and five small spoon-type measures; all have been produced and are available in retail outlets.

Why Canada is going metric

In a world which is now 99% on the metric system or in the process of actively converting, the potential benefits of the system to Canada amply justify conversion. These derive principally from the inherent simplicity of teaching and understanding the system with its inevitable and far-reaching effects on trade and commerce.