

concerning conversion. The commission was to advise the minister on the need for legislation or any other action that might be required to facilitate conversion and to make such reports on its activities as the minister might require. In July 1971 the first full-time chairman of the Metric Commission was appointed. He began to organize a group of part-time metric commissioners who would represent Canadians in all regions and cover a cross-section of the economy, and called the Metric Commission's first meeting on January 19, 1972.

The implementation of metric conversion requires that standards be available in metric SI terms to support that conversion. Standards set out the requirements for products, materials, devices, processes and services, to ensure uniformity and the safety of their users. Consequently, standards are one of the fundamental tools through which metric conversion will be achieved.

Standards in use in Canada may be categorized according to the level at which they are approved. These levels are: the company, the industry, and the standard-writing organization, as well as the national and international levels. The Standards Council of Canada is responsible for providing the required coordination for the conversion of standards within Canada. That council is also the Canadian member of the International Organization for Standardization and sponsors the Canadian membership on the International Electrotechnical Commission. These latter organizations, with headquarters in Geneva, represent national member organizations in countries containing four fifths of the world's population.

Effects of conversion on everyday life

In supermarkets, the use of metric designations on packages of food has already become familiar to shoppers. The effects of conversion will eventually pervade the lives of all Canadians though change to metric standards and language may have little or no effect on some products. These include those that are designated by numbered sizes (such as women's dresses) that are not the actual dimensions.

Long after the metric system has come into full use, thousands of homes will contain unconverted hardware items. People will not discard bathroom scales until they are no longer working. Kitchen stoves with thermometers in Celsius will make their due appearance but the old stove may be good for another 10 or 15 years. A change to the metric system will have no apparent effect on such domestic items as toasters, mixers, oil burners, electric motors, garden tools, lawn-mowers and many others for which dimensions are inconsequential. Eventually a new lawn-mower will cut a 48-cm swath instead of a 19-inch one, but to the user the two will be the same.

In sports, reaction to conversion may be varied. All international competition in swimming, track and field is in metric terms. In most court and playing-field sports adaptation will probably be the permanent response, keeping the same dimensions expressed in metric language. Significant changes to a baseball diamond would be unlikely because of the effect on the game. Distance between bases will remain the same though that distance may be described as 27.43 m instead of 90 feet. The same is true of basketball, tennis and squash. Football would present little difficulty since the field is almost exactly 100 m (metres) long.

In the important realm of transportation, highway speed limits are among the first obvious conversions. Adjustments are made to the nearest round figure. For example, 50 miles an hour converts closely to 80 km/h. September 1977 was the month chosen for Canadian speed limits to be posted in kilometres per hour (km/h) instead of miles per hour. As far as railroad lines are concerned there would be no question of tearing up track and replacing it with the metric-gauge track of Europe: two different gauges of track in a system would require two different sets of wheels and axles for every locomotive and car, and this would be both impossible and useless. Inevitably unusual and unthought of problems arise for solution. The British Metrication Board was posed the question of what to do about mileposts (used to pin-point accidents and repairs) situated along rail track. Relocation by kilometre would require 60% more posts so the mileposts were renamed; for example Milepost 42 is now simply Marker 42.