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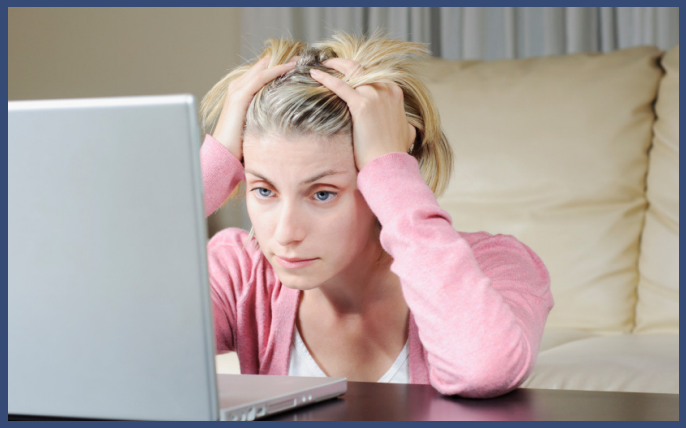
NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON WEIGHTS AND MEASURES
THAT EQUITY MAY PREVAIL

BUYING COMMERCIAL SCALES ON THE INTERNET



The internet brings many options to our buying decisions. While there is much to be said for supporting local businesses with known reputations and service after sale, more and more consumers are turning to the internet for convenience and often lower prices.

This can be a risky proposition when buying a scale that will affect your profits and be subject to regulatory requirements. This guide is designed to help you identify red flags and avoid some of the pitfalls if considering an internet purchase of a commercial scale. These things are important in any purchase of a scale, but may require additional effort on your part if you use an internet vendor.

Be aware of Regulations.

Most states require NTEP Certification for new scales that will be used in buying or selling. The NTEP Certificate is issued by the National Type Evaluation Program and it provides confidence that the model meets regulatory standards for design and performance and most likely can be approved for use in a commercial application. When shopping online, you will see the NTEP name, logo and often the phrase "Legal for Trade", but unfortunately things aren't always as they seem.

The NTEP name and logo are trademarked, but less reputable vendors have been identified using it without license and using it in misleading or deceptive ways. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to protect yourself in your purchase decision.

Do you know who you are buying from?

Look on the website for business name, a physical address, phone number and email address. A business that values its reputation and wants return business will eagerly provide its identity and contact information. Consider the reasons why a business might not be so transparent as you read through our tips.

Does the ad claim that the scale is NTEP certified, either through a statement or by placement of the NTEP Logo in the advertisement?

If you don't see it, don't buy it. Inquire first with the vendor about NTEP Certification. Even if the ad says it is NTEP certified, you need to verify it.

Does the ad identify the manufacturer, model and NTEP Certificate Number?

Most ads will include the manufacturers name, the model designation, and sometimes the NTEP Certificate number. It is important to understand what you are seeing.

Many scales come as a single instrument similar to what you see on the deli counter of your local grocery store. Other scales are advertised and sold as individual components which make up a complete scale. In this case, each of the components must have their own certificate number. This is where deception can occur. The NTEP logo placed in an ad would imply that the system is certified when, in reality, one or more components might not be.

If the vendor is willing to disclose information on the separate components of the system, it's a very good sign and gives you a tool for additional verification.

Look up the NTEP Certificate of Conformance.

A searchable database is available on the website of the National Conference on Weights and Measures (NCWM): the standards organization that administers NTEP. See http://www.ncwm.net/ntep/cert_search.

There, you can find and download the actual certificates. Many certificates even have pictures for comparison to what you see in the advertisement. The certificate will describe whether it applies to a component such as an indicator, a platform, the load cells, or if it applies to a complete scale.

If you want some help, NCWM is just a phone call away or you can contact your state regulatory authority. A directory is available at on the NCWM website at http://www.ncwm.net/resource/state-directors.

What does the phrase "Legal for Trade" mean?

In some ads you may see the phrase "Legal for Trade". This phrase is often misused even by many reputable dealers. Let's be clear on this one. No scale is legal for trade until the regulatory authority says it's legal for trade. NTEP Certification provides some assurance that it is manufactured to meet national standards, but there are other factors that the inspector must consider before approving the device for use in your business such as suitability, proper installation, and accuracy. Is the internet vendor helpful to you in understanding these other factors before selling you a "legal for trade" scale?

When comparing prices, consider the big picture.

Let's be honest; NTEP Certification is merely the bare-bones minimum standard. Anything less is not considered legal for commerce in most states. Maybe bare-bones is all you need, but don't assume all things NTEP are created equal. Some are higher quality than others and many have value added features that might help your business.

Does the internet vendor explain these differences for you? Also consider whether the vendor has an authorized local dealer who knows the legal requirements, can properly install and calibrate the scale and will be there for you after the sale.

If in doubt, contact your regulatory authority before you buy at www.ncwm.net/resource/state-directors.

They won't tell you what to buy, but they can tell you what not to buy. Many of them also maintain lists of licensed sales and service vendors who have demonstrated understanding of the requirements necessary for a scale to be "legal for trade".

It's an important purchase. Buy wisely. And also consider supporting that local business.