



WASTE REPORT for June 22, 2015

Measuring Waste

A teacher may have tried to teach you the metric system, but you probably still do not know what a 22° C temperature or 10K run really means.

Now the National Science Foundation is spending **\$188,000 to fund a university professor to write a book on “The Measure of Modernity: Standards and Standardization in the United States.”**¹ The grant synopsis notes, “A comprehensive history of standards and standardization in America does not exist...” The reasoning may be found elsewhere in the synopsis where it says, **“they [measurements and standards] are quite pervasive but rarely appreciated.”**²

While measurements and standard may be rarely appreciated, the U.S. government does spend millions of dollars each year on an office to promote and study weight and measurement, the Office of Weights and Measures at the National Institute of Standards and Technology. One of their functions is to promote broader acceptance of the metric system in the United States.³

In fact, the U.S. government has been promoting the metric system for 140 years. Why? Well, it would probably surprise most Americans to know that in 1875, the U.S. became a party to the Treaty of the Meter which **officially put the United States on the metric system.** But official or not, as was observed by the Monroe Administration in 1821, the free-market had caused a coalescence around a relatively uniform system of measurement, the American Customary System.⁴

As to a history of measurement, the Office of Weights and Measures has an array of publication about the subject, including, *Weights and Measurements of the United States: A Brief History.*⁵ While little has developed to prompt an update of this publication since 1975, if we need an updated history, they are the ones to do it.

¹ NSF, *The Measure of Modernity: Standards and Standardization in the United States*, Washington, D.C., Award No. 1331231, February 2015. Web http://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD_ID=1331231&HistoricalAwards=false

² Ibid

³ <http://www.nist.gov/pml/wmd/index.cfm>

⁴ Harris, William. "Why isn't the U.S. on the metric system?" 04 October 2011. HowStuffWorks.com. <<http://science.howstuffworks.com/why-us-not-on-metric-system.htm>> 04 May 2015.

⁵ *Weights and Measurements of the United States: A Brief History*, National Bureau of Standards, Department of Commerce. Washington, DC. 1975