

Firewood buyers should beware

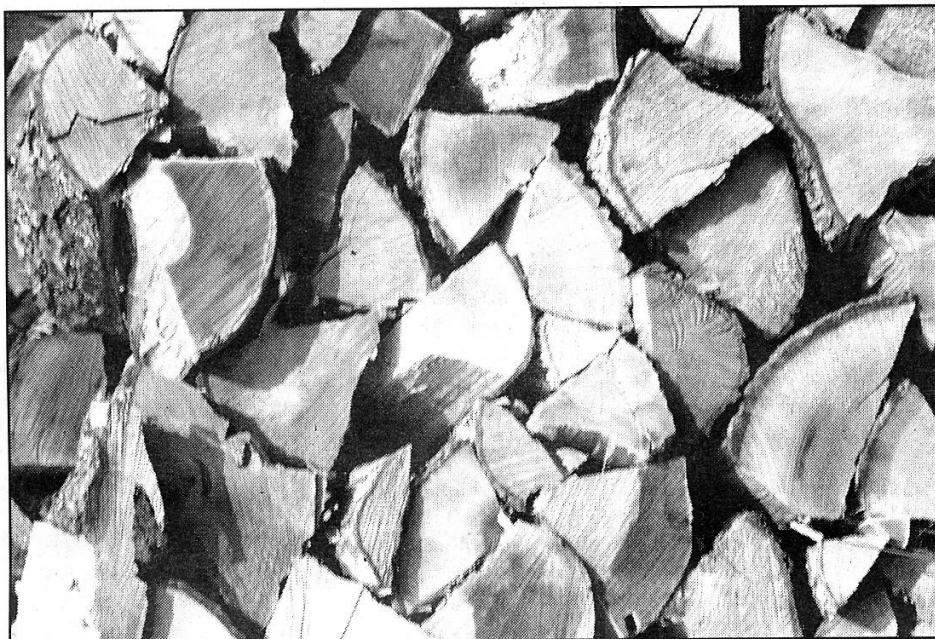
Contributed by Cathi Boze, Mariposa County Sealer of Weights and Measures

It's that time of year again – fall is in the air, winter is just around the corner, and what is more cozy and satisfying than a nice fire in the fireplace? It's also the time of year that the county department of weights and measures starts getting consumer complaints about shortages on cord wood deliveries.

When buying firewood from a dealer consumers need to realize that there are rules and regulations that firewood dealers need to follow, but they also have to realize that it's "buyer beware." The bottom line when purchasing firewood is that people have to measure their wood.

It's important for buyers to know exactly how much is in a cord. Firewood prices are running more than \$200 per cord, so the cardinal rule of wood buying is "measure first, pay later," once the customer is certain that he has received the amount of firewood ordered. A 50 percent shortage or more by a wood seller can make firewood a costly purchase.

It's not legal to sell firewood by the truckload, face cord, rack, or pile. State law requires firewood to be sold by the cord, fraction of a cord, or by cubic feet. National standards require a cord to equal 128 cubic feet of compact, stacked wood. To put it into perspective, in general, only one-half to three-quarters of a cord of wood fits in the bed of an average full-sized pickup truck. In order to carry a cord of wood, the full-sized pickup would need an eight-foot bed and racks to stack the



CORD WOOD IS TO BE STACKED TIGHTLY TO ALLOW FOR PROPER MEASUREMENT.

wood four feet high.

A cord is typically defined as 4 feet by 4 feet by 8 feet, but any stacking scenario can be used. To measure, the buyer should multiply the height, width, and length of the stack. The result should equal 128 cubic feet. Measurements taken in inches can be converted to cubic feet by dividing by 1728. The cord is the only legal unit of measure for sales of firewood in California.

To maximize satisfaction and minimize headaches, the Mariposa County Department of Weight and Measures offers these tips:

- When ordering wood, make sure that it is sold by the cord measure.
- When you buy firewood, get a receipt that shows the seller's name and address, price, volume, and type of wood purchased. If possible, get the seller's phone number and the vehicle make, model, and license plate number of the delivery vehicle. A rep-

utable wood seller ought to be willing (and is required by state law) to give you a receipt.

- Look at and measure the wood when it is delivered or when you pick it up. Ask the seller to stack it so you can confirm you received what you paid for. You may have to pay extra for this service.

- State law states that a cord should be "ranked and well-stowed." That means that you should stack the wood neatly in a line or row, with pieces touching and parallel to each other and stacked compactly, minimizing air spaces between pieces. Stacking wood in a criss-cross fashion falsely inflates the volume.

- The easiest way to know if you have the correct amount is to place wood in a pre-made, pre-measured rack designed and built to hold 128 cubic feet. That way you will quickly know if you have received accurate measure.

- Most important: Measure the wood before using any. If the cubic measurement indicates that you did not receive the correct volume, contact the seller immediately.

- If you're not satisfied about the amount of wood, don't pay for it until you are, and preferably pay for the wood by check.

- If the seller can't or won't correct the problem, contact the Mariposa County Department of Weights and Measures at 966-2075 before you burn any wood. Time is important in these investigations. You may not be the only customer to get burned by the wood seller.

Obtaining a bill of sale, having a canceled check, and measuring the wood when delivered can go a long way towards insuring that you get what you paid for.