

March 2003

Transition to the Metric System - A Window of Opportunity

By: Tom Coleman

The convergence of several economic factors provides a window of opportunity to facilitate the voluntary transition of the United States to the metric system of measurement. The transition to the metric system, which depends on an implementation strategy that facilitates the acceptance of the metric system by consumers will be driven by the economic interests of business. A major influence on consumer packages in the near future is the European Union (EU) Directive requiring all consumer packages marketed in the EU after January 1, 2010, be labeled in only metric units. This mandate, coupled with other global trends in the marketplace, indicates that the United States will see a gradual increase in consumer packages labeled only in metric units. There is a competitive advantage for multinational companies to market their products in a single set of packages and sizes for multiple markets. Labeling packages in only metric units increases the efficiency of companies to market their products, while giving consumers "reference points" within the metric system that will lead to an understanding of metric units. Understanding the metric system involves an educational process. Since much of learning is based on experience, this gradual learning process will ultimately lead to acceptance of the metric system in the United States.