

Report on Phase 2 of the National Weighbridge Project 2011 – 2012

Introduction

For the year, 2010 - 2011, the then Local Authorities Co-ordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS) had invited interested Trading Standards Services to participate in a national weighbridge project. This project was designed to establish evidence about the levels of compliance and accuracy of weighbridges. Local Authorities could then ensure that determinations of weight, which were consequently used as a basis for calculating disposal costs, landfill tax and recycling targets, were accurate and robust.

In May 2011, LACORS (then LG Regulation) published the report that summarised the outcomes of this project. LG Regulation also announced that they were unable to do any further work in this area. The 2010 – 2011 Project Report is accessible from the NMO website.

As a brief summary of the 2010 - 2011 report, two major points were noted:-

- 352 weighbridges at landfill and recycling centres were tested. 90 were found to be outside of the legal tolerance, being approximately 25.5%.
- The Type Approval Certificate (TAC) was checked for 36% of weighbridges tested, and all of these were found to be compliant. 45% however were not checked. Full details were not recorded for the other instruments.

It was clearly unsatisfactory to note that 25% of weighbridges tested were outside the legal tolerances.

It had been intended that Phase 2 of the project would be incorporated in current Local Authority weighbridge testing programmes, with existing resources allocated towards legal metrology.

Following the change in status of LG Regulation, NMO consequently agreed to coordinate a second phase of the project for the financial year 2011 – 2012, in order to determine any changes in levels of compliance and accordingly, NMO invited Local Authorities to participate in Phase 2 of the National Weighbridge Project.

The 2011 – 2012 Project

The 2011 – 2012 Project was again aimed at all Local Authorities with weighbridges used for waste disposal or landfill purposes, regardless of whether or not such Local Authorities took part in Phase 1 of the project.

The project applied to any large non-automatic weighing instrument, used at landfill sites, waste transfer stations or any other premises connected with the recycling or waste industries.

Results of Phase 2 of the Project

21 Local Authorities took part in the project.

The two major points that had been noted in Phase 1 of the project were revisited with the results that:-

- 148 weighbridges at landfill and various types of recycling centres were tested. 25 were found to be outside of the legal tolerance, being approximately 16.9%, representing an improvement of 8.6% from the previous year.
- The Type Approval Certificate (TAC) was checked for 35.1 % of weighbridges tested, and of these, 2 instruments (4% of those checked) were found to be non compliant. 60 % however were not checked.

The location of the weighbridges tested was reported as:-

- 11 % were at landfill sites
- 35% were at recycling sites
- 54% were at mixed use sites.

The frequency of use of the weighbridges tested ranged from 10 to 2500 times a week
The average value of transactions across the weighbridges tested ranged from £50 to £5000

Inspecting Officers were asked to give a subjective view of the condition of the weighbridges tested. This was reported as being:-

- 32.4% very good
- 45.3% good
- 18.9% ok
- 3.4% poor
- 0.7% very poor

More than 70% of the weighbridges tested had regular checks from service engineers / approved verifiers.

A wide range of frequency of cleaning was recorded, ranging from daily to never, and it was noteworthy that an instrument found to be 500 kg fast in balance (and therefore weighing in excess) did not benefit from a regular cleaning regime.

The major advice given to operators was:-

- To implement regular cleaning regimes
- To regularly review, and re-check where necessary, stored tare weight values.

Summary

The number of weighbridges tested in Phase 2 of the project was under half that of those tested in Phase 1, but the results of the tests still enable valid conclusions to be drawn.

There was a significant reduction in the number of weighbridges tested that were found to be outside the legal tolerance, from 25.5% in Phase 1 of the Project to 16.9%. A 16.9% failure rate is, however, still a matter for concern.

It was noted that the Type Approval Certificate (TAC) for only 35.1 % of weighbridges tested was recorded as being checked, and that 60 % were not checked.

Conclusions

16.9% of weighbridges tested were outside the legal tolerances and this is a significant improvement from last year. Whilst it is still a high failure rate, it suggests that planned and targeted inspectional work is effective.

The Type Approval Certificate (TAC) was not checked for 60 % of weighbridges tested. This is an important part of an inspection since it monitors the ongoing compliance of instruments throughout their service life, and helps to ensure that any additions or repairs to an instrument have been properly done in a compliant manner.

Weighbridges are an important class of weighing instrument which play a pivotal role in the recycling economy.

A high level of non-compliance is likely to have an adverse effect on all economic operators within the market place, and inaccuracies in consequential statistics could distort future decision making and planning.

Recommendation

The inspection of weighbridges in the waste and recycling sector plays an important part in maintaining accuracy and equity in an area of the economy that is of rising significance.

It is recommended that this significance should continue to be recognised by those involved in work planning.

NMO, November 2012

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