

 CONSUMER PROTECTION

 STANDARDS

 METROLOGY

 SUPPLIES CONTROL



## Metrology and Climate Change

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It is an undeniable truth that there is a long list of issues, social, economic, environmental, technological etc. impacting the world we live in today but none more so cross cutting as climate change. So without hesitation I think that we can all agree that it really doesn't matter which neck of the woods we find ourselves in, what language we speak, what cultures or traditions we practice, who is big or small or which country we are from, because on the aggregate we ultimately all stand to be affected one way or the other by the trans-boundary effects of climate change. Presumably then climate change should be on top of the list, if not, very near the top of the priority list of issues across governments regardless of latitude and longitude.

And while we may ponder or debate these issues in the corridors and hall ways of board rooms or meeting rooms, the bottom line is that it requires collective effort on the part of governments and their respective institutions, NGOs, private sector, academia, etc. to ensure that there exist the right set of policies and strategies to effectively reduce and mitigate the effects of climate change. These policies and strategies however, must be brought to life through strong institutions.

The National Metrology Institutes (NMIs) within the region I consider to be a part of this grouping of institutions. Simply put measurement becomes a central theme to climate change. How do we know the world is heating up? Well the data tells us so but the more important question is how accurate is the measurement? We must remember that where there is measurement there is uncertainty so there you have it "Measurement uncertainty". It's just a fancy way of saying that there is always an existing margin of error in measurements that must be taken into account when we are measuring and having the right conditions and calibrated instruments etc. helps us to reduce this margin of error.

Thus far it is without a doubt that a solid case can and should be made for the strengthening of National Metrology Institution who do nothing more than to breathe the science of measurements. I say this merely to reemphasize the current financial and human realities that plague us all in varying degrees across countries. Yet despite all of this, I am convinced that this reality must not be used as an excuse for us not to engage in meaningful dialogue. Despite the challenges we must remain open and more importantly willing to carry this conversation beyond meetings and workshops in a sustained fashion and with a level of consistency that can and will forcefully bring about change. In essence, it would be remiss of me not to impress the pivotal role that partnerships play. But this will not happen by itself. Actions need to be taken now in order to deliver benefits that will be with us for decades. So how do we get there? How do we handle the practicalities and the realities of achieving challenging goals?

I don't claim to have all the answers but let me offer you our reader at least part of the answer – by collectively being stubborn about a systems approach that fosters coordination and integration. Good governance capacities, enabling legal frameworks, and institutional arrangements, are necessary to provide credible frameworks to implement policy and engage with various stakeholders.

Now I know that metrology is not an easy pill to swallow especially, if it is the first time you are hearing the term used but if I can offer any consolation, I too as an Economist struggled to make heads from tails, and today I confess that my profession has never been the same, everything for me is measurements, measurements, measurements. Perhaps I may not have had a choice in the matter but as an outsider looking into the field I am always all too eager to engage in this subject on a personal and professional level. My final message then is that as you draw closer to metrology the stronger will be the partnerships that we seek, whether it's in energy, agriculture, health, transportation and this list can go on. Lastly there is a wealth of information and knowledge on Metrology that exists so I encourage you to become agents of this science why? Well first nothing can be more forceful and powerful than the human element and second the National Metrology Institutes cannot do it alone.

## World Accreditation Day 2014

In general, accreditation allows for governments, private sector procurers and consumers to have confidence in test results, inspection reports and certifications in all aspects of trade in goods and services thus the constant increase in the demand to have an accredited test result, an accredited inspection report or an accredited certificate to be able to conduct business (as per figure 1 above – one product = one test = one certificate = acceptance by all). This requires that at every process there is the independent evaluation by a recognized conformity assessment body (laboratory, inspection or certification body) against recognized and traceable national and international standards. All these efforts to ensure that confidence is embedded in the order of business and to raise awareness of the importance of accreditation related activities, stems from a global initiative jointly established by the International Accreditation Forum (IAF<sup>1</sup>) and the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC<sup>2</sup>) in celebrating World Accreditation Day annually on June 9th. The Bureau, as the National Accreditation Focal Point (NAFP<sup>3</sup>), recognizes the importance and benefits of accreditation in Belize and aims at increasing awareness by stimulating the participation of its stakeholders in the below process.

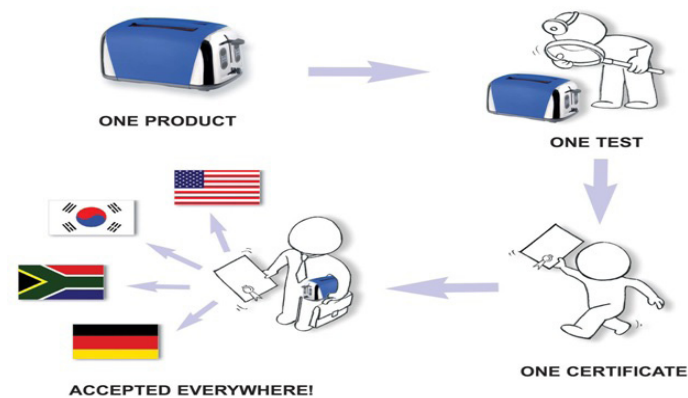


Figure 1: Accreditation Instills Confidence

In order for accreditation to be achieved there must be the relevant infrastructures in place to be able to sustain the necessary elements which include standards, metrology, testing, inspection and certification.

Currently the Bureau is seen as the sole entity in delivering the quality infrastructure network and typically mindful that in other countries these elements exist independently so as to avoid any conflict of interest. In Belize, there aren't any accredited laboratories for conducting any tests; there are no conformity assessment bodies; only a handful of companies are certified to quality management systems who have procured the services elsewhere at a high cost. Constantly the Bureau is being approached with an increase in the demand for accreditation services or initiatives. People are demanding the development of a medical laboratory network with the aim of establishing a recognized regulatory framework based on minimum requirements that will eventually lead to gaining accreditation (based on the accreditation system as per figure 3). Nevertheless, with limited resources and capabilities, the Bureau does its best to collaborate with its stakeholders in delivering these services.

## National Quality Infrastructure

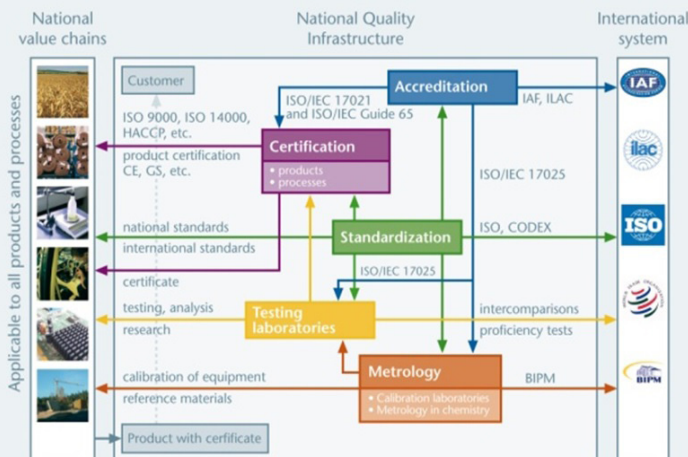


Figure 2: The National Quality Infrastructure

## Accreditation System

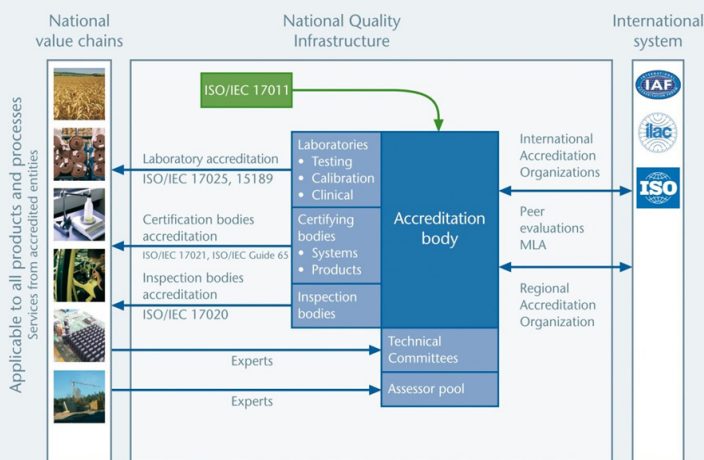


Figure 3: The Global Accreditation Network

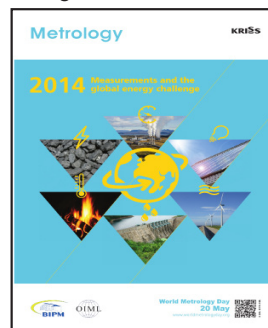
## Upcoming Events



World Metrology Day 2014 - 20th May - "Measurements and the Global Energy Challenge"

Public Service Information Day - 29th May

World Accreditation Day 2014 - 9th June - "Accreditation: Delivering Confidence in the Provision of Energy"



<sup>1</sup> World association for accreditation of conformity assessment bodies in the fields of management systems, products, services, personnel and other similar programs.  
<sup>2</sup> International cooperation on accredited laboratory and inspection bodies.  
<sup>3</sup> The Bureau of Standards (BBS) is the national entity responsible for coordinating accreditation activities in Belize and serves as the National Accreditation Focal Point.

Accreditation:  
Delivering Confidence in the Provision of Energy

# World Accreditation Day

9 June 2014



Accreditation: Delivering confidence in the provision of energy



Annually, World Accreditation Day is celebrated with distinct themes and this year's theme focuses on the role that accreditation plays in providing confidence in the provision of energy without causing any negative impacts. Looking at this year's theme "Delivering confidence in the provision of energy" we must reflect on the importance of energy provision which is an overlooked necessity for daily tasks and activities. As the population increases, they have grown heavily dependent on the convenience and luxury that is obtained through the harnessing of energy such as electricity being provided by the Belize Electricity Ltd (BEL). As the demand for energy increases with the number of households and businesses, methods for harnessing, storing and sharing energy need to be enhanced, monitored and controlled. There is immense pressure to ensure that these measures are implemented instantaneously and are safe. Regulators are tasked with the efficient provision of energy as well as ensuring the safety of their end users. This is accomplished in part by requiring accreditation of laboratories, inspection bodies and certification bodies. The Bureau has been liaising with the Ministry of Energy, Science, Technology and Public Utilities in the development of a strategy and sustainable energy action plan for Belize in March of 2014 – now in draft form Overcoming Barriers to Belize's Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Potential (RG-T1886-SN2). As an example, looking at the collaborating agencies the Bureau will be responsible for:

- adoption of labeling requirements for energy efficient equipment and
- looking at certification schemes for energy services.

This will surely require increased awareness and availability of information on energy services and equipment for consumers. With respect to the bullet points, it is imminent that the necessary infrastructure as it relates to resources, expertise, etc be identified and put in place in order to be able to ultimately deliver on the strategic objective of providing quality energy services and equipment to consumers. An infrastructure such as a laboratory is used to identify performance of devices used in the harnessing and periodically in the dispersal and monitoring of energy such as energy efficient equipment (ex. CFLs - compact fluorescent lamps). Laboratory testing is also fundamental to the proving of new technologies such as tidal and wind (or solar) energy. Safety inspections are carried out on a range of energy-related installations. Energy suppliers are certified to demonstrate that their processes and procedures are appropriate, and to declare their environmental credentials. In turn, certification to ISO 50001 (Energy Management Systems) can help businesses improve energy-related performance and identify energy reduction opportunities. Therefore as stated in paragraph one and two, you see the important elements coming up: standards, tests, inspections and certifications and this is how it all works. And how do we assure that these are all interacting beneficial to the consumers, businesses that they are procuring a quality product that is safe, can be utilized for its intended purpose, and meets energy efficiency objectives? The answer is ACCREDITATION of laboratories that provides the test results, of inspection bodies that provide the reports, of certification bodies that provide the certificates for conformity to an international standard. Therefore, the results of testing, inspection and certifications produce both consumer and regulatory confidence in products moving between markets. It allows manufacturers to test a product once and not multiple times thus reducing costs in the process of seeking regulatory approvals.

## Check the Car Facts

With the high flow of new and used vehicles being imported into Belize from the US, it is important that consumers are informed if they are getting value for their purchase. The US has recalls on hundreds of thousands of vehicles every year which without a doubt enters the Belize market. Consumers need to be advised as to where they can access information to determine if the vehicle they have or wish to purchase has been subject to a recall. Furthermore, they would require additional information on what specific part or parts are recommended for change and what risks exist if the necessary adjustments are not made.

The majority of the cars being driven in Belize are either manufactured in the United States or manufactured for the US market. As a result, there are web sites that motorists can visit to verify if there are any recalls on a specific brand vehicle or vehicle parts. Websites such as **recalls.gov** and **safecar.gov** have information from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) of the U.S. Department of Transportation which has been providing recall information on vehicle and equipment campaigns to consumers from 1966 to present. The campaigns include motor vehicle products which experienced a safety-related defect or did not comply with federal motor vehicle safety standards. The search may be done by brand of vehicle and also can include the model and year.

The advantages of visiting these websites includes a facility for consumers to check if a recall has been issued on a particular vehicle they propose to purchase, eliminating any safety or risk issue and avoiding to deal with a problematic car in the future. Consumers that already own a vehicle can also use the site to check if a problem they may be experiencing with their vehicle is due to faulty recall part eliminating the need to spend enormous amount of money for car diagnosis and repairs at a mechanic.

## Risk Associated with Buying on the Streets



Street vending is a popular economic activity in Belize which affords many Belizeans a means to generate income so as to sustain their families. The products sold ranges from fast food such as panades, burritos and salbutes, to wares such as plastic bowls and dishes. Some Guatemalan persons even cross the border on weekends to sell newspapers or textile items such as towels and socks. The gentleman in the above picture is one such enterprising individual out to generate some income. However, his product line is completely different.

This salesman is actually selling medications, vitamins and other pharmaceutical products. That is correct. Some of the same products normally purchased at a pharmacy

which are dispensed by a trained and certified person and sold within controlled storage conditions are in a basket and readily available for sale. Some of the items on offer includes: B-Complex, a vitamin which is used to improve concentration and mental state, ibuprofen, a pain reliever and other products which are used to enhance a man's virility and stamina. Such practices are rather common in the neighboring Central American Republics and have now made their way to Belize. The Belize Bureau of Standards can confirm that there is at least one such operator in Belmopan and Corozal towns and another two in the San Ignacio/Santa Elena area.

It is difficult to overstate the dangers of purchasing medications and pharmaceutical products from untrained, uncertified persons. The risks are even greater when such products are purchased from a street vendor who does not have the knowledge or training to advise customers about matters such as proper use, dosage and possible side effects of these substances. It is true that many supermarkets sell over the counter (OTC) medications in Belize. However, in most cases, such items are packaged and allow the customer to read the relevant information before use. In the instance cited above, pills are sold on a retail basis without the relevant product information. It is highly recommended that consumers exercise extreme care and caution when purchasing medications or pharmaceutical products and to make every effort to source such items from reliable, trained personnel. There may be serious health consequences to sourcing such items from a man walking the streets with a basket.

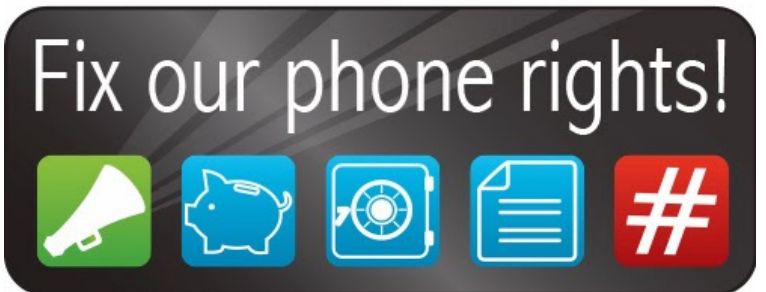
### Fix Your Phone Rights

World Consumer Rights Day (WCRD) 2014 was celebrated under the theme, "Fix Your Phone Rights; Justice for Mobile Consumers." Activities leading to 15th March, the actual date of WCRD, included a Warranty on Cellular Phone Survey and a repeat of the Unit's annual travelling booth display countrywide.

The Warranty on Cellular Phone Survey was conducted by the Unit in February 2014. This survey captured information on the warranty provided by selected establishments, if any, and the duration and terms of the warranty given. Following this, the Unit conducted its annual booth display in San Ignacio, Punta Gorda, Orange Walk and Corozal Towns.

By visiting the display residents of these areas were given the opportunity not only to receive information and pamphlets on the Unit but also a chance to win a cellular phone donated by several business establishments such as Belize Telemedia Limited (Digicell), Courts – Belmopan Branch, Cellular Plus, Cellular World and VIP Wireless. A survey was also conducted at the booth to capture the most popular brands of cellular phones and whether warranty is a big factor considered by consumers when purchasing a cellular phone. The booth displays were well received by the residents within the various locations with an impressive turn out in Punta Gorda Town capturing the attention of residents from several of the surrounding villages in that area.

As a part of the WCRD initiative, representatives from the Bureau also visited the Love FM Morning Show to enhance the public's knowledge of consumer protection in Belize.



**World Consumer Rights Day**  
**15 March 2014**  
**#phonerights**

### Cell Phone and the Draft Consumer Protection Bill

Most cellular phone establishments in Belize offer some form of warranty to the general public. This was captured in a recent Mobile Phone survey carried out by the Belize Bureau of Standards where most mobile phone stores in the municipalities of Belize City, San Ignacio Town, Dangriga Town, Punta Gorda Town, San Pedro Town, Corozal Town and Orange Walk Town were interviewed. The sample size was a total of 35 stores surveyed across the country to get a snap shot on cell phone information which included price ranges and warranties offered.

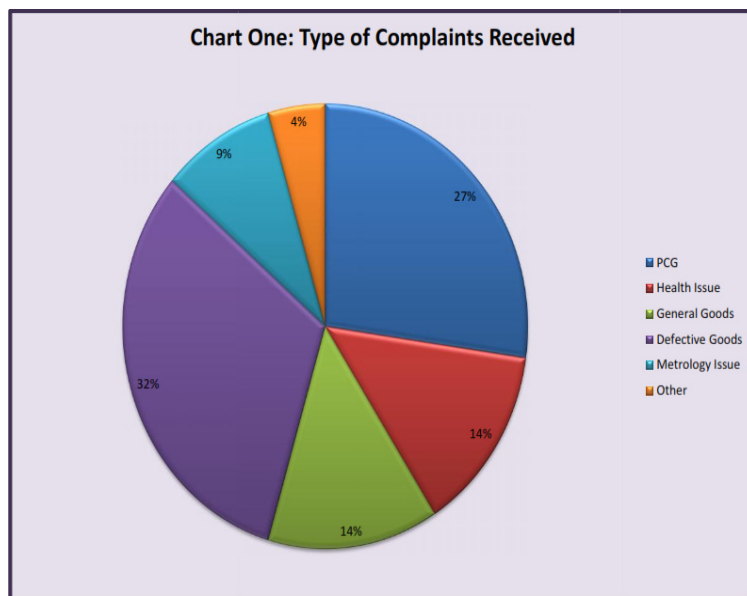
Most of the warranties offered on cell phones ranged between one (1) week to three (3) months with most stores offering a one (1) week period while some stores not offering a warranty. In general remedies provided to consumers under the warranties included exchange of product, money refunds for special cases, cell phone replacements and for product defects. The most common warranty coverage though, was for a product exchange and replacement of the cell phone with rare cases of refunds. It was noted that receipts were rarely provided to customers and in occasions where receipts were awarded, these did not display the name of the business and vaguely showed the warranty period if provided. Most establishments also had erected signs which denoted the business establishment's warranty policy instead of providing the warranty within the receipt. These challenges are faced by consumers within the cell phone sector of the economy in Belize.

The draft Consumer Protection Act of Belize proposes to protect consumers and can assist to eliminate many of the problems encountered in this sector of the Belizean economy. The law contains sections such as repair or replacement parts or components as would apply to cell phone cases. The consumer can be provided with an estimate and if so choose can then authorize the work. This estimate however cannot be billed to the customer unless the preparation of an estimate carries a cost.

Other inclusions of the law would enable consumers to rescind a consumer agreement on the purchase of cell phones (for example, to within 10 business days) after delivery of goods at no expense to them and allows a refund on the payment they made on the item. This would only apply if the product they purchased was returned in the same condition as when it was purchased. The law contains that a written record of each transaction is to be given to the consumer which must include the details of the transaction and identification of the supplier. This would then prohibit business establishments from using generic receipts. A major concern in Belize is that many cellular phones sold in the market are refurbished items. The law clearly stipulates that if a supplier is selling reconditioned, re-built or re-made goods a notice must be visible to the customers.

Warranties under the draft Consumer Protection Act will include goods and services supplied, whether those goods are new or used or whether the service offered is for the repair of any appliance. And in the absence of an explicit warranty an implied warranty of six months on parts and labour shall be put in place for goods and services supplied in Belize. With the implementation of the Consumer Protection Act many of the problems faced in the Cellular phone sector and others can be eliminated as appropriate redress may be provided to the Belizean consumers.

### Complaint Chart (January to March 2014)



### Verification Exercise

The Metrology Unit verified a total of 244 hand pumps in Orange Walk, Belize and Cayo Districts; of that, a total of 13 hand pumps were found to be working inaccurately as it was over-registering, leaving a total of 231 as accurate. A total of 5 Liquefied Petroleum Gas establishments were visited which account for 9 weighing instruments being verified, whilst 3 were found to be outside of the maximum permissible error allowed leaving 6 as accurate. As it relates to industrial and medical industries a total of 4 weighing instruments were verified across 3 establishments and all 4 were found to be accurately working.

### Regional & International Participation

- 27 - 28 February 2014 - 6th Meeting of the Consumer Affairs, Antigua and Barbuda
- 19 - 20 March 2014 - Development and Implementation of Tools for NMI's to Improve User Relations, Barbados
- 28 March 2014 - Development of a Generic Regional Laboratory Framework, Trinidad and Tobago
- 7 -11 April 2014 - Twenty Fourth Council Meeting of the CARICOM Regional Organisation for Standards and Quality (CROSQ), Barbados
- 24 - 25 April 2014 - 7th Meeting of the Consumer Affairs, Kingston, Jamaica

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