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Old dogs can be taught metric tricks

but not without problems, professors say

Dr. Fred Binding, a psychologist at Wilfrid Laurier University, believes many people will have adjustment problems as the metric system invades the grocery stores. But he thinks metric is better.

And a Laurier science professor, Dr. Robert McCauley, a biologist, feels metric is fine in the laboratory but the familiar Imperial system serves us well in everyday life.

Dr. Binding said few Canadian people are convinced about the world-wide and long term advantages claimed for the metric system. They already have a system they understand, have used all their lives, and that allows them to solve everyday problems in an "unthinking" manner.

"The unfamiliar, especially when it is forced upon us, is upsetting and prompts us to wonder why we should change something that works fine," the Laurier psychologist said.

"Not surprisingly many see the metric system as needless, disruptive and even as a sinister plot. Grocery store pricing will soon confront us with 'meaningless' metric measures. But old dogs can be taught new tricks but not without some pain."

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He added that children, now brought up thinking metric, will suffer no adjustment problems since they will not have to learn a new "mother tongue."

Dr. McCauley said he has been using the metric "language" since he was 14-- but in the laboratory and not in everyday life where the English or Imperial system works "just fine."

He noted that the Imperial system bears a relationship to man since a mile is about 1,000 paces and a foot is about the length of a person's foot.

He said that some "humanizing" of the metric system is perhaps in order and cited the German "pound," which is a metric measure about 10 per cent larger than the English pound. The German metric pound is 500 grams. The German metric popularization retains the cup measure, at 250 millilitre, the unit of wine drinking.

"In this polycultural society I have no difficulty in using the metric system and the English system where they are appropriate," the Laurier biologist said. "I resent the metric system's P.R. men who keep telling us we can learn metric in five minutes and enjoy it.'