

Metric conversion unlikely but effects of law remain

By Todd von Kampen
Senior Reporter

The U.S. government started promoting the metric system about 10 years ago, but Americans have not accepted the new measurement system, a state official said.

lished under the act, was closed by the Reagan administration Sept. 30, 1982, he said.

But the act has had lasting effects in some industries, Malone said. Distilled liquors are sold mostly in metric units, he said, while the soft drink industry includes one- and two-liter bottles in its packaging.

"Something in any shape or form in your automobile will be metric," he said. "You'd better have a set of metric tools."

Other industries use both systems to serve domestic and international needs. Andy Riffe, grain merchant for the Omaha office of Cargill, Inc., said his company uses bushel measurements with farmers but converts to metric tons when selling to export companies, since most other countries use the metric system. Conversion costs the company nothing, he said.

"It's much easier to do it in bushels," Riffe said, "both in the way the farmer understands the market and the way the domestic markets understand it."

Although many people understand metric units because they learned them in school, most are unlikely to want metric measurements used in everyday matters such as driving, Malone said.

"People are familiar with 55 miles an hour and 125 miles to Kearney, and they don't see any reason to change," he said.

The Nebraska Department of Roads has no plans to add metric distances to its road signs, said Louis Lamberty,

director. Unless the federal government requires the change, the state is "not anxious to spend the money" on new signs, he said.

Malone said he thinks the U.S. metric movement ran its course and further conversion is unlikely.

"I don't see this happening in my lifetime," he said, "and I've got a few years to go."



Phil Tsai/Daily Nebraskan

"To the general public, it's kind of died down a lot," said Steve Malone of the Nebraska Department of Agriculture's weights and measures division. "Not many people are talking about it."

Although the 1975 Metric Conversion Act encouraged U.S. citizens and businesses to convert to metrics, the federal government never has made a changeover mandatory, Malone said. Federal interest has dwindled since the U.S. Metric Board which was estab-

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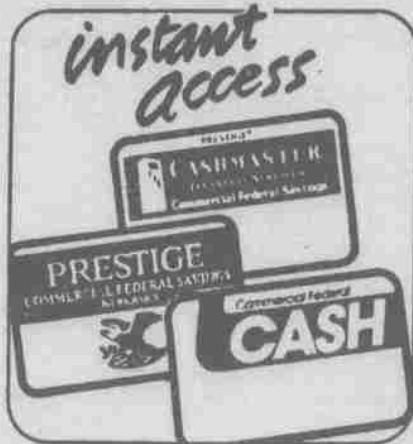
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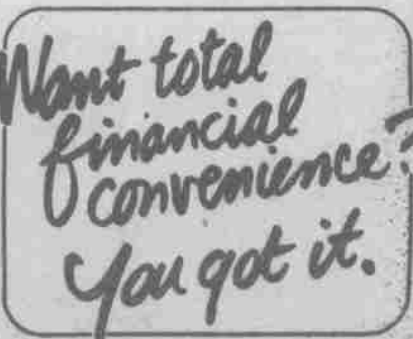
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