

THE CONFUSING METRIC SYSTEM

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Ask an American why the US doesn't use the metric system and the typical answer is that it is too confusing. That answer was always confusing to me because the metric system is so very simple. Then I remembered the sign I saw while driving down I75. It said

Cincinnati

100 *miles*

161 *kilometers*

People would think metric system hard because something as simple as 100 miles becomes 161 kilometers – very confusing indeed.

I think we should have signs like

Cincinnati

100 *kilometers*

61 *miles* (or 488 *furlongs*)

School Zone

35 *kilometers/hour*

21.4 *miles/hour* (or 18.6 *knots*)

No Parking within

30 *meters*

96 *feet* (or $1\frac{1}{2}$ *chains*)

It is not just distances. Instead of

Milk

$\frac{1}{2}$ *gallon*

1.98 *liters*

think

Milk

2 *liters*

67.6 *oz* (or 2 *quarts* & 1 *gill*)

What Americans don't understand is that in the metric system you don't have to convert by strange amounts. There are 100 centimeters in a meter and 1,000 meters in a kilometer. That is all you need for measuring distance in daily life. Forget inches, hands, links, feet, yards, fathoms, poles, chains, furlongs, miles, nautical miles, leagues, etc., etc.

Not all measurement have been metricized although the French tried. We still have hours, minutes and seconds for time and degrees, minutes and seconds for angles. I have been told the French military resisted metricizing these units because their firing tables for cannon were in these old units.

But Wait! Sometimes the metric version is more complicated. One tablet of aspirin is usually 325 mg whereas it is just 5 grains in the original apothecary system of weights. Maybe we should keep the old avoirdupois, troy, and apothecary systems of weights after all.