businesscompanion
trading standards law explained

Units of measurement

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In this guide, the words 'must' or 'must not' are used where there is a legal requirement to do (or not do) something. The word 'should' is used where there is established legal guidance or best practice that is likely to help you avoid breaking the law.

This guidance is for England, Scotland and Wales

Metric units

If you are indicating units of weight or volume, only the permitted abbreviations (symbols) can be used. These are shown in the table below.

Unit of measurement	Symbol
Metre	m
Centimetre	cm
Millimetre	mm
Square metre	m^2
Cubic metre	m^3
Litre	l or L
Centilitre	cl or cL
Millilitre	ml or mL
Tonne	t

Unit of measurement	Symbol
Kilogram	kg
Gram	g
Milligram	mg

Vulgar fractions are not permitted (unless it relates to a fraction of a pint). For example, 500 g cannot be expressed as $^{1}/_{2}$ kg.

If the word 'net' is used, it cannot be abbreviated.

Supplementary imperial units

Imperial units can be shown as well, but they must not be more prominent than the metric indication. The permitted units are shown in the table below.

Unit of measurement	Abbreviation
Yard	yd
Foot	ft
Inch	in
Square yard	sq yd
Gallon	gal
Quart	qt
Pint	pt
Fluid ounce	fl oz
Pound	lb
Ounce	oz

Except where the law and trade practice dictates otherwise, liquids should be marked with a volume (ml or L, for example) and other products by weight (g, kg, etc).

Under the Weights and Measures (Quantity Marking and Abbreviations of Units) Regulations 1987, quantity indications must be easily visible, legible and indelible. Under the Weights and Measures (Packaged Goods) Regulations 2006, they must also be of a minimum height, depending on the pack size.

Trading Standards

For more information on the work of Trading Standards services and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law, please see 'Trading Standards: powers, enforcement and penalties'.

In this update

No major changes.

Last reviewed / updated: May 2026

Key legislation

- Weights and Measures (Quantity Marking and Abbreviations of Units) Regulations 1987
- Weights and Measures (Packaged Goods) Regulations 2006
- Food Information Regulations 2014

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links go to the legislation.gov.uk website. The site usually updates the legislation to include any amendments made to it. However, this is not always the case. Information on all changes made to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

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