

WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?



Is measurement technology important to the National Bureau of Standards? To commerce and industry in the United States?

For the majority of us, the answer is a resounding YES! A mission in measurement technology

was woven into the original enabling legislation of NBS. Measurement technology underpins the industrial superiority of the United States, especially in the high technology explosions going on now in electronics and other important sectors.

Much of our nation's strength in international trade derives from our advanced ability to measure and our sophisticated management systems which determine the strategic and tactical moves to exploit that technology. Our nation is the envy of much of the world.

This unique national measurement technology has grown up without anyone truly being in charge. A wide variety of driving forces really put the system in place—for example, legal requirements for equity in trade, economic requirements to improve productivity, technology breakthroughs which make possible the semiconductor revolution.

And now this *National Measurement System* baby has grown into a giant. Dr. R. D. Huntoon of NBS coined that term in the October 6, 1967, issue of *Science* magazine with an article entitled, *Concept of a National Measurement System*. His opening paragraph spells it out: "Concurrently with the growth and industrialization of this nation, there has developed within it a vast, complex system of measurement which has made possible the very growth that brought the system into being. This *National Measurement System* (NMS) stands today as one of the key elements in a worldwide measurement system that links all major nations together in a consistent, compatible network for communications and trade."

An exciting concept! Especially because the infrastructure of the NMS is so invisible and widespread, but still so important to our increasingly technological society.

In 1972 the Assistant Secretary of Commerce directed the preparation of a study of "The NBS

Standards of Measurement to Determine if Their Accuracy is Sufficient for the Needs of U.S. Industry." This request led to initiation of a three-year study of the National Measurement System.

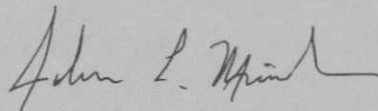
The study was a massive effort involving many people at NBS in all divisions of the Institute for Basic Standards. The result is an equally massive series of reports which constitute an impressive "snapshot" of a very complex and pervasive system. This system underpins the technological-economic structure of our country and its relation to the world.

But in this great size and strength is also a great weakness. *No one is in charge!* The NMS is without direction. And that causes me serious concern. Six percent of our gross national product is involved with measurement. Larger percentages of our high technology science and industry sectors are even more crucially dependent on NMS.

In my opinion, the National Bureau of Standards should be assigned responsibility as the National Measurement Science Center, with the duty to further refine the present status of NMS, define future directions, and provide the management impetus for a national commitment to keep our nation's science, technology, and industry in a leadership position.

This isn't going to be easy. There are sentiments in our population and Congress that science has gone wrong; technology has messed up our lives.

But we of the scientific and industrial community who can understand the implications need to make ourselves heard. The National Conference of Standards Laboratories will be working for a national commitment to meet national needs.



John L. Minck
Immediate Past President
National Conference of
Standards Laboratories

In October Minck completed his year as President of the NCSL. NCSL is an association of 295 companies and organizations which maintain or have an interest in measurement standards and calibration facilities. Minck is an executive in the Stanford Park Division of the Hewlett-Packard Company. He has been active in measurements for most of his 19 years with HP.