

Metric System vs. Imperial System

In the world currently there are two commonly accepted systems of measurements: the imperial system and the metric system. For the last 200 years the metric system has been winning the battle against the imperial system for being the most widely accepted way of measuring things and for good reason. As it stands today there are only 3 countries that do not use it. Those countries are Myanmar, Liberia and The United States of America. This raises the question, why? Why use a system that is clearly less useful than the other? I believe that the U.S. should switch over to the metric system.

To understand why the different systems are used you need to know where they came from. To start, the imperial system was created and put into place in 1824 by the British Weights and Measurements Act. The new system was created to replace the Winchester Standards from 1588. The imperial system came to be used by the entire British Empire until the latter end of the 20th century when the metric system was formally adopted because it was easier to use and more consistent. The adoption of the metric system didn't happen before the colonization of America however, so the imperial system remained in America and, obviously, still is used today.

The imperial system has been developed and changed for centuries. The Romans that settled in early Britain defined a mille as 1000 paces, which is two steps each. The mille became known as the mile and was about 5000 ft. The foot came about from the length of the foot and the inch is about the distance of a mans thumb. These archaic measurements were made the way they are because they are convenient and fairly consistent throughout the population but today they are outdated and nonsensical to use in many cases.

Measurements later evolved and changed to become more defined until, like stated before, the imperial system was created. In 1558 the metric system was proposed but not adopted by a major country until France did so in 1795. It took more time for other countries to adopt the system, and now today most of the countries around the world use it.

Despite its obvious limitations the Imperial system has at least one well grounded advantage, it is easily put into context. When somebody tells you a measurement like 2.5 cm you don't often know right off the top of your head how long that is. You have to think about it for a little bit. With the imperial system if somebody tells you 1 inch you immediately know how long that is. It's about the length of the tip of your thumb. The way that the Imperial system was constructed makes it very easy to use for everyday measurements because it is tethered to a more human reality. Even with that small advantage the metric system still comes out on top for its all around accuracy and usability.

The metric system is superior to the imperial system for a few reasons. One, it is easier to use because the whole measuring system is based off of constants and is base 10. This

makes it easier to remember and do calculations. The imperial system however is based off of outdated measuring techniques and is even today defined using metric measurements. For example, the foot is defined as being 0.3048 meters. This is not to say the imperial system doesn't have practical uses though.

In 1999 NASA's Mars Climate Orbiter was destroyed when it came in too close to Mars. This problem was caused because the system used by the orbiter was using metric measurements and the team on earth guiding it didn't. The orbiter was worth \$125 million. In 1994 the FAA found that a cargo plane landed 30,000 lbs. overloaded. This was because the conversion between pound and kilogram was done incorrectly. These are just a couple examples of why the world should use one system: the metric system. If we did, communication and mathematical errors would happen less often and measurements would be seamless and accurate.

The imperial system has its benefits aswell in contradiction to what was stated before. The imperial system has measurements based on human anatomy so it is often easier to measure something with reasonable accuracy by eye/touch. An example of this would be when you go out in the morning to a cool morning. You could reasonably guess the temperature because the Fahrenheit system is based on human touch and feeling. It is also useful when you need to measure small distances because an inch is about the length of a person's thumb. So the imperial system does have its place in practical everyday use but for accuracy and consistency the metric system is superior in every fashion which is why the change over to metric should be made.

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