of its packaging is, for Garbage-Project purposes, at once valuable and compelling. Of course, the remains of meat in fresh garbage or at a landfill are not the most pleasing archaeological artifacts that one can handle. The packaging is bathed in blood and in a kind of clear slime whose viscosity feels to the touch like that of molten gristle. The associated artifacts include the familiar absorbent deli pad, or "meat diaper," that drips sanguinary rivulets on the garbage-sorters' aprons. This is the kind of experience that sorting entails, and there's no getting around it. In the sorting yard, as the garbage is dumped onto tables, one person in thick gloves picks through it, looking for all the world like a surgeon with his hands deep in a patient's entrails, and calls out information to a second person, standing some distance away, who carefully records it (see Figure 3-C). Once entered into a computer's memory, the data are available for analysis.

Meat-wraper labels provide a demonstration in microcosm of the tenuous grasp many of us have on even the most familiar of objects and behaviors. How are meat weights recorded on a package? In pounds and ounces, most people will say. In fact, they are written in pounds and tenths of pounds and hundredths of pounds. Two market researchers, Helen C. Brittin and Dale W. Zinn, found in the course of a 1977 survey that 40 percent of all shoppers interviewed as they left a supermarket misreported the amount of meat they had just bought by significant amounts. The Garbage Project has found a similar pattern in comparing what people say they have prepared and eaten in the way of meat with what is indicated by discarded packages, bones, and cut-away fat. Some people simply can't remember cuts or quantities; others either consciously or unconsciously misreport.

One of the most consistent patterns with respect to meat is what can be called the Spike Effect. When asked about quantities of meat bought or prepared, respondents tend to round off the numbers into pound (sixteen ounce) or half-pound (eight ounce) increments—who knows what .17 pounds really means? The pervasiveness of this tendency is striking; for example, when asked about their consumption over a certain period of time, in ounces, of such things as red meat, poultry, cheese, saturated fats, and pork bacon, in 80 percent of all cases respondents gave figures that were divisible by eight,