



Re:Action



We hope you enjoy this newsletter which tells you a little about the work we do and provides you with information and advice.

Good trader scheme

Did you know that Kent Trading Standards runs a good trader scheme called Buy with Confidence (BWC)? All scheme members are thoroughly checked and approved before they are allowed to join.

Consumers can search online or call Consumer Direct and ask for a printed list of traders. You can also go online to our website (See details below) and see a video clip of one of our BWC Approved Traders giving tips on how to find a good tradesman.

What do customers think?

We ask BWC scheme members to hand out feedback forms to all their customers who then return the forms to us. Since the introduction of the scheme in Kent more than 2,500 consumers who have used BWC traders have given their feedback in this way.

- **99%** are satisfied with the quality of work
- **99%** are satisfied with the level of service received
- **96%** are satisfied with the value for money

Some typical customer comments:

"Excellent, friendly, helpful, value for money, great job"

"Very professional and efficient and customer friendly. Would not hesitate to use again and recommend to others".

Need consumer advice?



www.consumerdirect.gov.uk

If you need consumer advice, Consumer Direct can help.

All Kent consumer enquiries are dealt with by Consumer Direct South East (CDSE) a government funded organisation set up to offer initial advice to consumers.



Only the more complex or technical enquiries are referred to the local Trading Standards service for possible action.

Recommend a trader

Have you used a Kent based trader you would recommend to others?

If so please tell us so that we can contact the business and invite them to apply for membership of the Buy with Confidence scheme.

For more information visit
www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk

Visit our website
www.tradingstandards.gov.uk/kent

All in a day's work

Protecting consumers

Kent Trading Standards enforces a wide range of legislation to protect the consumer, ensure that businesses compete on a "level playing field" and to control farm animal welfare and disease. Our officers liaise with other Trading Standards services across the country and work closely with organisations such as the Police, Customs and other enforcement agencies.

We have an "intelligence led" approach to all our work and use campaigns to find out the extent of a problem or to target known problems. It does mean we rarely investigate individual consumer complaints, but we do record all information supplied to us as this is a vital part of our intelligence gathering. This way of working benefits everyone by concentrating our activities on those issues causing the most problems.

Prison sentence

A prolific counterfeit DVD seller who had evaded conviction for 3 years was finally caught and sentenced to a total of 6 months imprisonment.



Doorstep caller prosecuted

A cold calling doorstep trader who carried out home repair work on a consumer's house was prosecuted for failing to give the customer a cancellation notice.

He was fined a total of £250 and ordered to pay £800 costs.

Large fine for haulier

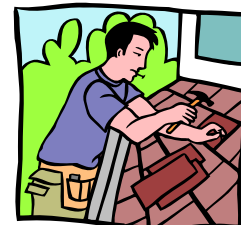
A Dutch company was fined and ordered to pay costs totalling £10,370 for transporting live sheep through Dover on standard passenger ferries, and declaring the load as meat.

The company was using converted refrigerated trailers to carry live animals on standard ferries from Dover, which do not carry livestock, as a cheaper and quicker transport option.

Prison for bogus roofers

Following a lengthy investigation across Kent, other south east counties and Bristol, a team of distraction burglars were convicted on charges of conspiracy to commit burglary.

The group, who were also very active cold calling roofers received a total of 32 years imprisonment.



Fakes fund organised crime

Producing counterfeits is big business for organised criminal gangs, so anyone buying fake goods is likely to be supporting serious crime such as drug dealing, human trafficking and prostitution. It can also provide extra income for benefit cheats.

Not only that but fake goods will almost always be poorly made and may well be dangerous.

Underage sales led to lost licence

Complaints about underage tobacco sales led to an investigation involving Kent Trading Standards, Kent Police, HM Customs and Swale Council.

The retailer had ignored a previous warning about selling age restricted goods to young people and was subsequently caught during a test purchase operation. He was found to be selling non-UK duty alcohol and tobacco and subsequently lost his licence to sell alcohol.

Warnings ignored

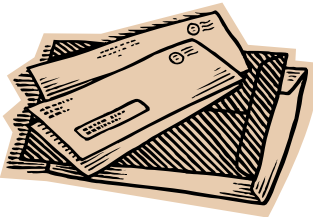
A shop keeper who ignored previous warnings was fined and ordered to pay a total of £3,465 for selling out of date food. Dates on the food varied with the most out of date being soft cheese 13 days beyond its "use by" date.

SCAMS — don't get conned!

Beware non existent winnings!

Although most of us will have received letters claiming to have money waiting in a lottery fund or a winning prize in a competition, the fraudsters who send these letters often deliberately target older people.

The letters will invariably ask for money to be sent to cover "administration" costs before they can send you the prize.



Don't be taken in by these letters, they may look very convincing but ask yourself some questions:

- Have I recently entered a competition?
- If I have won – why do they want me to pay?
- Do I know where the money I send is going?
- What are they REALLY offering me? –

READ THE SMALL PRINT

Sometimes it is obvious that the money you send is going abroad. More commonly, the address will be in the UK usually a PO Box. Don't be fooled. This address is used only to collect the mail which is then forwarded to another address, often abroad and it is not uncommon for the mail to be forwarded on again making it very difficult to trace.

If you respond to such an 'invitation' to claim a prize, you are likely to receive more and more similar 'invitations' asking for larger and larger sums of money.

You can help

Please keep an eye on elderly or vulnerable neighbours and if you think someone you know is being targeted by doorstep criminals please report it to Trading Standards via Consumer Direct on **08454 04 05 06**

Think Jessica—a true story

Scam mail is causing huge financial and mental stress to millions of victims of fraud. It is believed that 7 out of 10 older people in Britain are the target of scams — either by phone or by mail. Some confused and worried victims have taken out bank loans to pay criminal gangs, while others make regular money transfers to criminals abroad.

Visit the Think Jessica website to read the true story of one victim. The website has been set up to try and help others to avoid falling prey to the same criminals that Jessica did. (www.thinkjessica.com). If you have been a victim or need further advice please call **Consumer Direct on 08454 04 05 06**

Buying at the door

We always advise consumers to be wary when dealing with doorstep callers.

In most cases if you agree to buy something at the door costing more than £35 the law gives you a "7 day cooling off period" to change your mind. The trader must give you a written cancellation notice if you agree to have any work done. (See page 2 for details of prosecutions involving cold calling doorstep traders)

The Smart Guide to Scams

The Smart Guide to Scams gives guidance on how to deal with doorstep criminals, scam mail and unwanted phone calls.

Download a copy from our website or contact Consumer Direct if you would like a printed copy sent to you.



Remember!

If it sounds too good to be true it probably is

Useful information

Consumer rights in Europe

European Consumer Centre for Services (ECCS) is a new free website and telephone service for consumers providing general information on consumer laws and rights when buying a service in other European countries.

Visit the website www.ukecc-services.net/

Useful contacts

Citizens Advice Bureau

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/

European Consumer Centre for Services

www.ukecc-services.net

phone: 08456 08 94 94

Kent Neighbourhood Watch Association

<http://www.kcnwa.org/>

Kent Savers credit union

www.kentsavers.co.uk/

Fact sheets

We produce a wide range of fact sheets covering all sorts of consumer issues.

These can be downloaded from our website or if you prefer you can call Consumer Direct on 0845 04 05 06 and ask for a consumer advice pack to be sent to you.

Visit our website

www.tradingstandards.gov.uk/kent

This newsletter and our other publications are available in alternative formats on request.

Need to borrow money?

People struggling financially may turn to lenders such as "pay day loans" or worse, illegal money lenders (loan sharks). Using such lenders will mean paying extremely high interest rates.

A **pay day loan** is a short term loan designed to last one month or possibly two. You may hear such phrases as "five minute decision" or "money in your bank today". Other businesses known as "doorstep lenders" collect weekly payments from you at home.

Loan sharks are illegal money lenders who often encourage borrowers into a spiral of more debt, borrowing more and more money. Borrowers are likely to be intimidated and threatened with violence if they can't repay on time.

If you need to borrow money, think very carefully about how much you will have to repay and check to see if you could use an alternative lender such as Kent Saver's Credit Union.

The following example shows the difference in the likely interest rates.

Lender	Amount borrowed	Repayments	Total repaid	Interest paid
Doorstep Lender	£500	£17.50 over 52 weeks (1 yr)	£910	£410
Credit Union	£500	£11.00 over 52 weeks (1 yr)	£570	£70

Always check the total charge for credit before signing any paperwork!

Loan Shark helpline

Contact the Illegal Money Lending Team for confidential help and advice on **0300 555 2222** (local call rate, including inclusive minutes from mobiles).

Email: stoploansharks@kent.gov.uk

Text: loan (space) shark (space) + your message to 60003.