

Please use this section to notify us of any trading malpractices etc you wish to report:

Where did you see this newsletter?

Have you any comments or suggestions which might improve the usefulness or contents of this newsletter?

Please return this slip to the address shown below:

Sheffield Trading Standards
2 - 10 Carbrook Hall Road
Sheffield S9 2DB

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Santa's 12 Sensible Shopping Tips



As the festive season approaches many people's thoughts turn to buying presents for family and friends. South Yorkshire Trading Standards Services have issued the following seasonal shopping advice and tips to ensure consumers have a Happy Christmas:

- * Always keep your receipts in case of problems – they prove when and where you purchased goods.
- * Look out for counterfeit goods, especially alcohol, tobacco and perfume as they may be unsafe.
- * Order goods to be delivered in plenty of time – delivery can often take up to 28 days.
- * If you make purchases by mail order or on the Internet you have additional rights, such as a cooling off period – ring Consumer Direct for more information.
- * Pay for items over £100 on a credit card because this gives the buyer added protection.
- * Remember when asking for a refund that traders may only refund back onto your credit card if that is how you paid.
- * You have the same consumer rights with sale goods as you do with full price goods.
- * Remember that if you buy presents from street traders they may not be there to return goods to after Christmas.

- * Check if gift vouchers have an expiry date.
- * You are not entitled to a refund because something is unwanted or you change your mind – check out the trader's returns policy for unwanted presents.
- * Check you are not overcharged in restaurants and bars during the busy festive period.
- * Avoid falling prey to loan sharks. Christmas is not worth a year or more in serious debt!

If any difficulties do occur and you wish to seek advice, you can contact **Consumer Direct on 08454 04 05 06**. The lines are open from 8.00am to 6.30pm Monday to Friday and 9.00am to 1.00pm on Saturdays.



consumer direct

www.consumerdirect.gov.uk
08454 04 05 06
clear, practical consumer advice

funded by government

Clear, practical consumer advice is only a phone call away...

CONTACT DETAILS



Trading Standards
Regulatory Services, PO Box 602,
Barnsley, S70 9FB
Consumer Advice: 08454 040506
General Enquiries: 01226 772468
Fax: 01226 775699
e-mail:
regulatoryservices@barnsley.gov.uk
www.barnsley.gov.uk



Doncaster
Metropolitan Borough Council

Trading Standards Service
PO Box 257, The Council House,
College Road, Doncaster, DN1 1RN
Consumer Advice: 08454 040506
General Enquiries: 01302 862365
Fax: 01302 737950
e-mail:
tradingstandards@doncaster.gov.uk
www.tradingstandards.gov.uk/doncaster



Where Everyone Matters
Trading Standards

Howard Building, College Lane,
Rotherham, S65 1AX
Consumer Advice: 08454 040506
General Enquiries: 01709 823151
Fax: 01709 823143
e-mail:
tradingstandards@rotherham.gov.uk
www.rotherham.gov.uk



Trading Standards
2 - 10 Carbrook Hall Road,
Sheffield, S9 2DB
Consumer Advice: 08454 040506
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www.tradingstandards.gov.uk/sheffield

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SOUTH YORKSHIRE NEWSLETTER

TRADING STANDARDS SERVICES

Issue No: 12

Winter 2009



Fool's Gold

Don't lose out with those 'golden opportunities' to raise extra cash!

Are you tempted to join the Gold Rush and turn your unwanted jewellery into cash? If you are thinking of sending your old gold items off in the post for a 'guaranteed top payout' Trading Standards advice is "think again".

The recent credit crunch, coupled with unusually high prices being paid out for gold, has seen a flurry of activity from a wide range of traders, who are inviting customers to part with their unwanted gold items in exchange for cash. Some traders have always offered this service and may have just increased their level of advertising to attract business. Others are relatively new players in the market, but the newcomers have had a remarkable impact on consumers through expensive full colour newspaper advertisement and lavish day time TV ads.

This new breed of trader invites you to post your unwanted gold jewellery off to them in a special envelope and, after valuation, they send you a cheque with the promise of the return of your goods if you are not completely satisfied. But can you expect a good payout? Not according to one local consumer who decided to try out a market leading company. The consumer in question sent off

30 grams of mixed 9 carat gold items and received £45 in return. Anyone doing their sums would discover that this equates to £1.50 per gram.

So how does this compare with other traders? Not very well according to an investigation by Trading Standards officers in Sheffield. At the time, it was easy to raise £5 to £6 per gram for 9 carat gold at local retailers and one market trader in the city centre was found to be paying out £6.50 per gram!

Clearly the best prices by far are gained by shopping around, although this inevitably involves either visiting a few retailers in your area or perhaps phoning them to check on their current rate. Remember, trading gold by postal methods is perfectly legal but it is unlikely you will realise anywhere near the market value for your valuables, and it's not just the price that could leave you feeling let down. Always check the terms and conditions of what you are agreeing to. Our checks into the small print revealed some hidden surprises. For instance, a valuation carried out to test the quality of your gold could mean your valuables are damaged by chemicals or taken apart. Refuse their offer to buy and you'll have no guarantee your goods are returned in one piece.

Another type of operation is emerging whilst gold prices are good. "Gold parties" are on the increase according

to one company in the UK. The parties are set up in the 'host's' home and invited guests are encouraged to take along their unwanted gold jewellery to be valued by the company's representative who also attends the party. If a deal is done, the customer goes home with cash and the host earns commission. For many guests, this may appear like harmless fun and an opportunity to redeem unwanted jewellery for hard cash. But few of us probably have only a rough idea as to the true value. The best advice is for guests to do their homework first before taking their unwanted jewellery along to the party.

Finally, consumers should not be confused with claims about the value of gold being 'over \$1000 per ounce' during the current surge in bullion prices. This is the price being paid on the world's gold markets for pure gold. 9 carat gold consists of only 37.5% pure gold (9/24ths), and 18 carat has 75% (18/24ths).

Remember, there are a number of risks involved in posting off your unwanted gold – not just the risk of it going missing, but also the risk of receiving a woefully poor pay-out in return. Our advice is shop around to get the best price, and in these circumstances... LET THE SELLER BEWARE!



Phone Scams... it's good to talk but not to these fraudsters!

Every day, people throughout the UK fall victim to scams of one kind or another - bogus prize draws, lottery wins, get rich quick schemes or exciting new investment opportunities.

Advances in phone technology have provided yet more opportunities for the fraudsters to test us with their tricks and cons. Bogus calls are usually designed to convince you to hand over your credit card or bank details so be cautious. Remember that if the caller's offer sounds too good to be true it probably is!

Next time you get an unusual or suspicious phone call, ask yourself a few questions to avoid falling victim to a scam:

- * Do I have to respond to the offer immediately? Why the rush?
- * Do I have to make a purchase to win a prize?
- * Do I have to ring back on a premium rate number?
- * Do I have to give my bank or credit card details to the caller?
- * Why is the caller so reluctant to give their address or contact details?
- * Am I being asked to keep the call confidential?

Many scams work by tempting you to phone a premium rate number with the promise of a prize or reward that may never materialise. The longer you stay on the phone, the more money the scammers will make from you. Premium rate telephone numbers are expensive and are often the fraudsters main tool. These types of scams can take many forms, including phoney competitions, deceptive credit card promotions, holiday offers and fake delivery services.



Trading Standards have seen a rise in complaints about unsolicited callers offering credit or debt related services. Whether you're being offered the chance to clear debts, claim back overpaid council tax or recover bank charges, there's always a fee and very little to show at the end of it.

There is a popular scam that's been doing the rounds a long time and many people in the UK have already fallen for it. Callers receive unsolicited phone calls tempting them to send thousands of pounds to obtain winnings from fraudulent lottery schemes operating out of Canada. The winnings don't exist, and some victims have lost over £300,000 by responding to more and more phone calls demanding payments to cover costs in order to obtain their winnings. Sadly, the chance of these victims getting their money back is highly unlikely.

Councillor Roy Miller, Spokesperson for Barnsley Council's Regulatory Services, said "The advice is to NEVER give your bank account details over the phone. If you are called out of the blue ask the caller to write to you with details of their service. Always check with a trusted friend or relative before committing yourself to any offers or sales made over the phone." People can also register with the Telephone and Mailing Preference Service to stop unwanted calls and junk mail. Registration forms can be obtained by calling **Consumer Direct** on **08454 04 05 06**.

Winter Rogue Trader Warning

Trading Standards officers in the Yorkshire and Humber region are warning householders to be extra vigilant during the coming winter months.

The warning comes as we enter the period when rogue traders seek to take advantage of the changing weather and target vulnerable consumers for roofing work and garden clearance services.

Communities are warned to keep an eye on elderly and vulnerable relatives and neighbours, to ensure unscrupulous rogue traders don't try and take advantage of them. Typical ploys involve charging extortionate prices for unnecessary work, carrying out shoddy repairs or taking money without doing any work at all.

Phil Glaves of Sheffield Trading Standards said "Previous years have demonstrated that, whilst rogue traders operate throughout the year, there is likely to be an increase in the numbers operating now to carry out roofing work. Typical scams include claims that tiles or chimneys are loose and dangerous, or that leaks will occur and damage properties. Large sums of money are also charged for small amounts of gardening work, to clear away shrubs and trees in preparation for winter.

As a result, we would urge people not to deal with doorstep traders. If householders wish to report doorstep callers or are worried because cold callers have warned that urgent work is required at their properties, they should contact **Consumer Direct** on **08454 04 05 06**. In emergencies, they should contact the police on 999".

Trading Standards services in South Yorkshire are committed to tackling doorstep crime and use a variety of initiatives to deal with offenders and to protect communities. As well as prosecuting those responsible for scams, initiatives such as No Cold Call Zones are used to protect vulnerable householders from cold-callers.

Waxing lyrical about Candle Safety

Candles are as much a part of the Christmas trimmings as mistletoe, tinsel, and baubles. They can create a warm cosy atmosphere and sales of candles will soar over the seasonal period. But how many of us read the safety instructions that accompany the candles?

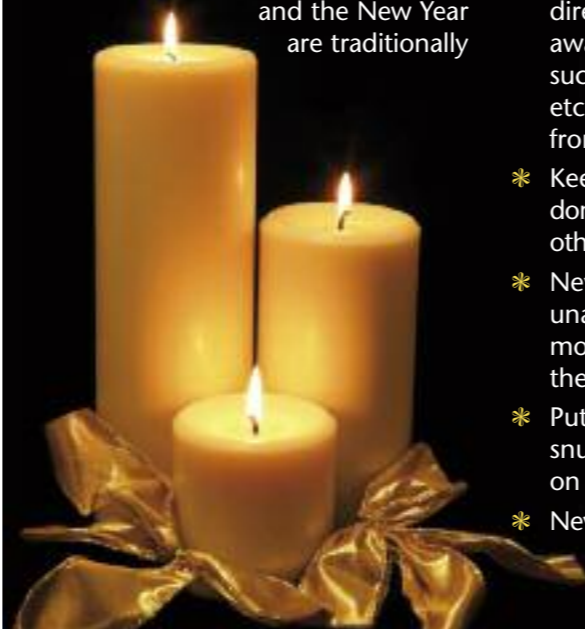
Statistics from hospital accident records indicate that each year there are over 1,250 injuries caused by candles in domestic premises. About 10% of these injuries occurred in situations where candles were left unattended, often when the user fell asleep. Fire Service data also shows that candle related incidents account for 3% of all house fires.

Night lights and tea lights must not be used without placing them in a holder first, this is because their own tin containers get extremely hot as the candle burns down. Many accidents have been recorded where tea lights have been positioned on plastic surfaces such as bathtubs or on top of TV's and the tin containers have melted through the plastic causing a fire.

Young children can be fascinated by candles so ensure they are positioned well out of the reach of small hands and away from areas that pets can get into. It's not only children who need to take care - Christmas and the New Year are traditionally

the time for parties. When the alcohol starts flowing and the guests are dancing around the room to the latest sounds, remember that fancy party dresses and hair can be highly flammable so keep candles well out of the way or don't use them at all. Candles need to be treated carefully so follow these points for a safe Christmas:

- * Always read and follow the instructions supplied with candles and candle holders. Ensure you remove all packaging before use.
- * Use an appropriate non-flammable holder. Make certain the candle is upright in the holder before lighting and that the holder cannot fall over easily.
- * To avoid damage to surfaces always place candle holders on a surface that will not be damaged by heat e.g. ceramic tiles or plates. Table mats are NOT suitable.
- * Trim the candle wick to ½ inch (1cm) in length before lighting and relighting. If the candle smokes, put it out and trim the wick. Ensure you carefully remove any debris from around the wick before relighting.
- * Ensure candles are placed at least 4 inches (10cm) apart and allow plenty of headroom above the candle for the heat to disperse. Candles should not be burned in direct sunlight, and must be kept away from other sources of heat such as fireplaces, television sets etc. This is to prevent the wax from overheating and flaring up.
- * Keep candles out of draughts and don't position them near curtains or other flammable fabrics or furniture.
- * Never leave burning candles unattended, and never attempt to move candles when lit or when the wax is still liquid.
- * Put out candles with a candle snuffer. Never use water or blow on a candle to snuff it out.
- * Never use outdoor candles indoors.



Police officers demonstrate cash machine safety in a street scene at the Lifewise Centre.

Crucial Crew Event for the over 50's

During September 2009 Trading Standards and Regulatory Services staff from Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield worked in partnership with the South Yorkshire Police, the South Yorkshire Fire Service and local community groups to provide an event for the over 50's called Crucial Crew.

The aim of the event is to provide elderly and vulnerable people with information and practical advice about living safely in their own homes and keeping safe whilst out and about in the community. The event has been held for the past few years and is staged at the Lifewise Centre, Magna Science Museum, Rotherham. Free return transport was provided for the participants who were invited from all around South Yorkshire.

The event started with a welcome and introduction from a senior police officer. The participants then attended a series of interactive and informative scenarios that included home safety, fire safety, road safety and dealing with crime and anti-social behaviour. After lunch there was time to observe a play demonstrating how to reduce the risk of becoming a victim of doorstep crime and also an opportunity to browse amongst stalls promoting appropriate beneficial information and advice targeted at over 50's. The event concluded with a quiz and free prize draw.

If you are over 50 and would like to know more about these types of events and services in your community contact **Consumer Direct** on **08454 04 05 06**.



Please use this tear off slip to contact us if you require further information, or if you wish to report any trading malpractice that you may have experienced.

Name:

Address:

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Daytime telephone no:

e-mail:

I would like further information on:

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Please use reverse side



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