

## Cambridgeshire Trading Standards July 2011

### What issues have we been addressing over the last 3 months?

In our consultation at the end of 2010, residents told us that their top three priorities were food safety, product safety and rogue traders. Below you can find out what we have been working on over the last three months, including the work we have been doing on these three areas of priority.

#### **Tackling rogue traders**

After months of investigation, in May we carried out wide-spread raids across the county and into a neighbouring county to uncover rogue trading activities. We believe that these rogue traders have targeted over 100 victims, many of whom are particularly vulnerable, and have taken many thousands of pounds from them in exchange for shoddy, unnecessary or fictitious work. Our investigations into the activities of these individuals are ongoing and we hope to have the first court hearings before the end of this year.



This kind of crime has far reaching consequences, not only for the individuals and families of those affected, but also for the reputation of legitimate, honest businesses, so it will remain our priority to target this kind of crime.

For advice to help you choose a reliable trader, view our [webpages](#).

#### **Counterfeit vodka seized from Cambridgeshire premises**

A programme of joint visits was carried out with the police and Revenue and Customs to various business premises in Wisbech, and Trading Standards uncovered 220 litres of counterfeit vodka in one premises.

Counterfeit vodka can pose a tremendous risk to health, containing all kinds of harmful chemicals, so it is critical that we identify those that are selling it and remove it from sale.

To sell alcohol you need a licence, and a number of different agencies are asked to consider your suitability to hold a licence before it is granted to you. The premises found to be in possession of counterfeit vodka is likely to undergo a licence review to determine whether they should have their licence

to sell alcohol revoked. Without it, they would be prohibited from selling alcohol in the future, helping to protect the health of the public.

If you know of anybody selling counterfeit vodka, or counterfeit tobacco (which is also extremely harmful to health) please [report it](#) to us.

### **Checking for harmful metals in toys**



Heavy metals in toys can be harmful to babies and young children so it is against the law to sell children's products that contain high levels of heavy metals in the UK. In fact, in 2007 there were major recalls of Mattel toys (amongst others) when many toys with high lead content found their way into UK shops. We have therefore carried out a sampling programme to check for the presence of these metals in certain products being offered for sale in the county. From the samples we took and tested, we are pleased to report that none of the toys contained harmful amounts of these metals.

If you would like more information about child safety issues or product recalls see our [Product Safety](#) webpages.

### **Testing the safety of second hand electrical products being offered for sale**

When it comes to electricals, second hand products can pose an electrocution and fire risk if they have not been stored or cared for properly, or due to general wear and tear. Therefore we have done some work to test the safety of such products in the county. What we found was that most goods sold through second hand and charity shops did not cause concern in relation to consumer safety. Retailers were having the items checked by competent testers and all upholstered furniture was found to be correctly labelled to show that it complied with fire safety regulations.

Our advice to you when buying second hand goods is to look for the green "pass" test label on electrical items and to make sure that upholstered furniture has the manufacturer's safety label attached.

### **Issues with second hand car sales**

We have continued to visit second hand car dealers across the county due to the fact that the highest levels of consumer enquiries we receive relate to issues with second hand cars. The project also covers roadside car sales, ensuring that traders who sell in this way are abiding by the law, just as we would expect from a garage. This is a long term project, spanning several months. For more information, please see the report from April 2011 available on our webpages. For advice on what to consider when ['Buying a car'](#), see our web pages.

## Improving our advice service for Cambridgeshire businesses



Cambridgeshire County Council's Trading Standards has become a 'Primary Authority' to provide businesses in the county and further afield with clear, concise advice and support.

We believe this will support and strengthen local businesses, making us an approachable organisation that businesses can come to with issues, queries and concerns, enabling us to work with them to help them get things right. This is a far more positive approach to regulation with more effective outcomes than the more traditional regulatory approach.

At the time of writing, Ridgeons, Westland Horticulture, Plasti-Kote, Spemark, Windhorse Trading, Touch of Ginger and Kimbolton Fireworks have already signed up to the scheme.

## Tackling the most complained about traders



At our last Tasking Meeting in April we identified 12 traders in the county whom we had either received *serious* complaints about or an *above-average number* of complaints about. Out of those 12:

- We have visited and provided advice to seven traders and all are now compliant with no further valid complaints received
- We are investigating one of the businesses currently
- We are assisting Bedfordshire Trading Standards with an investigation into a Bedfordshire trader who has affected consumers in Cambridgeshire
- One of the companies has gone out of business
- Two of the businesses we looked into but found no compliance issues.

We are unable to provide further details about the businesses concerned.

In addition, we have successfully prosecuted Price Properties, a letting business, for failing to pass on rental payments to landlords and failure to hold tenants deposits in a ringfenced bank account. As a result of our action the court issued the Director, Sharon Price, a 5 year disqualification from acting as a Director and a fine.

We successfully prosecuted the owner and salesman of Premier Protective Coatings, Robert (Bob) Dempsey and Paul Lilley, who had misled a customer by telling him that their special rendering materials would prevent rising damp

– a claim that was found to be false by the Court, who awarded a full refund to the customer and fined both individuals for aggressive sales practices under the Consumer Protection Regulations.

Three individuals who were copying and selling DVDs at Wisbech Market have also signed Cautions. Cautions have a legal standing, being registered on the central register of convictions, and therefore form part of a persons criminal record.

## **Looking forward – what are we working on over the next 3 months?**

### **Checking food descriptions in restaurants**



We will shortly be starting a food sampling project in a sample of pubs and restaurants to ensure the food they are providing matches the description eg. checking claims that food is 'organic' or 'home made' as customers tend to pay a premium for such foods.

As well as protecting customers, this is also good for the local restaurant industry. It helps to ensure a level playing field for restaurants in the county, making sure that some aren't at an unfair advantage by using false descriptions. It also makes sure that restaurants aren't being misled by their suppliers when it comes to food descriptions.

### **Raising awareness of cancellation rights amongst traders**



We frequently come across traders who are not aware of the need to give cancellation rights to consumers when they agree to contracts at home. Not giving an appropriate cancellation period can mean that the trader can't enforce the contract should the customer chose not to pay for any or all of the work undertaken.

Although the law has been made to protect consumers, it can be of tremendous detriment to traders if they aren't aware of the requirement, so we will be doing some educational work amongst Cambridgeshire traders to raise awareness of the need to provide these cancellation rights and what form this needs to take.

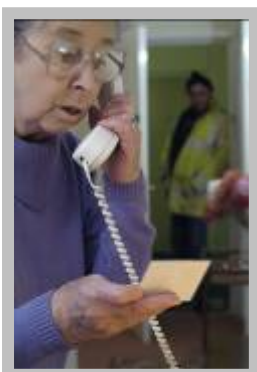
### **Feed sampling project on farms**

Trading Standards work includes ensuring that food entering the food chain is safe to eat. A part of this work involves checking the raw ingredients that go into the human food chain, as well as checking the feed being given to farm animals.



This particular project will focus on grains, visiting some of the grain producers in the county to ensure that grain is being stored hygienically before being processed into cereals, biscuits and the like for humans, and into animal food for cows, pigs, sheep and chickens. We will also be visiting livestock farms to ensure that the animal feed is being stored hygienically before being fed to the animals.

### **Senior Safety days**



We work with a number of partner organisations to help older people stay safe in their homes. Trading Standards role in this is to make sure older people know the tell tale signs of rogue traders and scams, which so often target older people and can lead to them losing many thousands of pounds and, in some cases, their independence.

We are getting together with some of these partners in October to offer 'Safe in your home' events for the over 60s in Burwell (7<sup>th</sup> October at Burwell House, North Street, Burwell) and Littleport (19<sup>th</sup> October at Littleport Village Hall, Victoria Street, Littleport).

The partners will include the police, the fire service, the Bobby Scheme, and Care and Repair and residents will be able to chat to these partners and get tips and advice on staying safe at home.

### **Tackling the most complained about Traders over the next 3 months**

In our Tasking meeting we also looked at current issues and newly emerging 'problem' traders. As a result, we are monitoring the activities of eight specific traders in the County, and looking into the business practices of a further three with a view to advising or commencing an investigation as appropriate.

These traders are identified from looking at the complaints we have received in the last three months, as well as Intelligence received from other Agencies and from our own officers from their work out and about in communities.

We have also identified an increase in enquiries to do with cold calling of energy saving schemes such as solar energy and loft insulation, so we will be publishing articles across the village magazines and other specialist magazines to provide advice on where to find independent advice on these topics. This article can be viewed on our [news pages](#).



Image source: Energy Saving Trust

Again, we are unfortunately unable to identify the traders or trades concerned.

**Next tasking meeting: 10<sup>th</sup> October.  
A report will be published shortly afterwards.**