

**Tasking Meeting
Cambridgeshire Trading Standards
April 2011**

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

Issues with second hand car sales

Due to the nature of second hand cars, we receive a number of complaints each month about issues with second hand cars that have been bought from garages in the county. In many cases, garages are not liable as the faults are due to general wear and tear, but nevertheless, we are carrying out a project to look at the safety of vehicles, descriptions of vehicles and terms and conditions being used at garages across the county to ensure that garages are aware of their legal responsibilities and that consumer rights are being respected. The project also covers roadside car sales, ensuring that traders who sell in this way are also abiding by the law, just as we would expect from a garage.

For advice on what to consider when ['Buying a car'](#), see our web pages.

Issues with domestic appliances & electrical equipment

Each quarter we also see a number of complaints about electrical/domestic products purchased from major retailers, and this in part is due to the volume of sales these retailers have – proportionately the more products you sell, the more issues are likely to arise.



The complaints that we have received we have taken up with the Trading Standards Officer who co-ordinates complaints for the retailers concerned nationally. As a result we have been advised that the retailers are investing heavily in staff training between January and April this year, to address the kind of issues we are seeing.

One thing we raised was the fact that we have seen several complaints from consumers about the retailer telling the customer to go straight to the manufacturer when they had a problem, rather than the retailers addressing the issue themselves as they are legally obliged to do in some cases. As a result of this, we have found out that the retailers have an agreement with the manufacturers they buy from so that, in the case of a claim, the manufacturer will deal with the customer directly on the retailers behalf to make things easier for the customer. This issue therefore is simply down to communication.

We hope to see a reduction in the number of complaints as a result of this training programme.

If you want some advice on a domestic appliance you have bought, visit our ['large domestic appliances'](#) webpage.

Preparing for the Digital TV switchover

In the last quarter, we have been supporting the Digital UK and the Digital Switchover Help Scheme in their work to raise awareness of the digital TV switchover. Other counties have seen rogue traders take advantage of the digital switchover, misleading people about what was needed. We have therefore been working to try to raise awareness amongst the most isolated people in Cambridgeshire to ensure that know what is happening and where they can go for help so that they are not misled by rogue traders. We have provided information through village magazines, doctors surgeries, libraries, roadshows, groups and organisations. The digital switchover has now taken place and we are pleased to report that we have had no rogue trader incidents reported to us.

For further information on ongoing support following the digital TV switchover, visit our ['Digital switchover'](#) webpage.

Home security alarm sales

Both ourselves and the Police received a spate of calls about home security companies, selling home alarms door to door. They were using high pressure selling techniques, claiming to be associated with the police and misleading customers about the price of products. We sent out alerts to the public through press releases and neighbourhood watch co-ordinators, but before we were able to locate them they appear to have left the county. Advice was given to customers affected.



For advice on this topic, see our article available from our ['news'](#) webpage.

Computer virus protection scam

We received several complaints from consumers who had been telephoned by someone claiming to work for 'Microsoft' or 'Windows' and stating that from their central system, they could see that that customer's computer had been affected by a virus. They would then ask that person to let them dial into their computer to 'fix' the virus and would ask them to agree to a long term virus protection contract. These people did not work for Microsoft or Windows, and in fact the Police shut down 19 such scam organisations last year. We issued a [press release](#), as did the police, to warn the public about the latest version

of the scam and will continue to issue press releases and articles as these scams evolve.

Tackling the most complained about traders



At our Tasking meeting we also identified 15 traders in the county whom we had either received serious complaints about or an above average number of complaints about. Out of those 15:

- We have prosecuted one business
- We have had an Undertaking signed by one business under the Enterprise Act to desist from certain conduct
- We have issued a formal warning letter to one business
- We are investigating two of the businesses currently
- We are working with one business closely with to improve their trading practices
- We have visited and provided advice to five businesses as part of the car project
- We have advised two of the businesses and our monitoring has shown we have had no new complaints
- We are continuing to monitor one company who may need intervention in the future
- One of the companies has gone out of business

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

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

Raising awareness of Scams



We have seen an increase in complaints about scams. One relates to a consumer scam – a prize draw – and we will be issuing articles to community magazines to educate readers on prize draw scams. We will also be looking to run a scams awareness campaign in the county.

The other relates to a scam targeting businesses, whereby businesses agree to advertise in a publication which they are told will be circulated to certain audiences eg. government bodies or emergency services, only to find that this is not the case. Links to further information about [business scams](#) and advice have been made available on our website.

Helping to overcome fuel poverty

During the freezing temperatures over the winter, we saw increasing reports about the number of people suffering from fuel poverty. As a result we have secured funding to provide training for individuals in Fenland who, in turn, will be able to advise local residents on the issue and how to ensure they can stay warm next winter. This will be linked to our [Home Shield initiative](#).

Checking the accuracy of the measures on heating oil tankers

Closely linked to our work on fuel poverty and energy costs, is our work to test heating oil tankers to check they are giving the correct measure of fuel to customers. This helps to ensure the customer are getting what they pay for, and likewise that the heating oil businesses are not losing money by providing the customer with more oil than their measures say.

Tackling sales of alcohol to children by pubs and bars

We work hard to educate and provide materials to off license premises, helping them to challenge under 18's who are trying to buy age restricted products.



This year we are also going to be participating in some training for pubs and bars, helping to share what we have learnt by working with retailers, thereby helping them to challenge the age of suspected underage customers.

For more about our work to tackle underage drinking, visit our [Community Alcohol Partnership](#) page online.

An approved trader scheme for everyone in Cambridgeshire

We currently operate a [Registered Trader Scheme](#) for the over 60's, thereby protecting the most vulnerable people from rogue traders. However, we are conscious of the fact that any of us could fall victim of a rogue trader and that it is not only the over 60s. We are therefore looking to introduce the Buy with Confidence scheme in Cambridgeshire which will be available for all residents.



This is something we will be looking to develop over the next 5 months, and more information will be available on our website as soon as we are in a position to open this scheme to businesses and the public. In the meantime, if you run a business and would be interested in knowing more about the scheme when it goes live, please [contact us](#).

Checking the accuracy of public weighbridges

We will be testing the accuracy of public weighbridges and the highest risk private weighbridges. Businesses make decisions and determine cost based on the weight given at weighbridges, so it is important for good business that they are accurate.



Tackling the most complained about Traders over the next 3 months

In addition to those ongoing traders we are monitoring or investigating referenced above, two further traders were identified for investigation, and two further businesses were identified for monitoring. A further trader has also been added to the car project visits list.

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.

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

**Next tasking meeting: 11th July.
A report will be published shortly afterwards.**