

Cambridgeshire Trading Standards October 2011

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

Tackling rogue traders...through educating residents

Our legal action against a major network of rogue traders operating in this county, as well as neighbouring counties, is progressing well.



However, an equally important aspect of this work is to educate residents so that they can avoid rogue traders in the first place. To support this educational activity we have included 15,000 rogue trader information leaflets (provided free of charge by the Office of Fair Trading) in flu packs across the county, helping to reach some of the most elderly and vulnerable residents. Such individuals are particularly targeted by rogue traders, and this work forms part of a larger educational campaign that will take place over the next 12 months by the service.

This month we are pleased to announce that we will be launching a Buy with Confidence scheme in early 2012, providing Cambridgeshire residents with a safe source of traders that they know they can trust. See the '**Buy with Confidence**' item below and visit the [Buy with Confidence](#) website for more information.

Tackling the sale of alcohol and tobacco to children in the county

Educating businesses...

For a number of years we have worked closely with alcohol and tobacco retailers in the county to help them put measures in place to support staff in challenging young customers for proof of age, such as the [Challenge 25](#) scheme. We are now taking this a step further, visiting every retailer that has just been granted their first licence to sell alcohol or an additional licence to sell from a new premises. That way we can support them in ensuring they comply with the law right from the start.

As well as providing advice to businesses, it is also important that we test their approach is working. We therefore sent 15-16 year old volunteers into shops over the summer, under our direction and covert supervision, to see if

they were sold alcohol or tobacco. The shops were selected based on Intelligence. This work is done jointly with the Police and failures can result in, amongst other things, a 48 hour closure order or a licence review for the premises. These sanctions are very costly for the business, but reflects the seriousness of the issue and the harm that can be done to young people by these products. Materials and information to support businesses is available on our [webpages](#).

Educating young people...



Trading Standards, the Personal, Social and Health Education Service (PSHE) and the NHS have also been working in partnership with four secondary schools in the county running a very successful smoking prevention programme called 'Kick Ash'. 15 year old pupils volunteer to become 'mentors', educating pupils aged 13-14 in their own school and 10 year olds in local primary schools, about smoking. They also assist CamQuit (Cambridgeshire's Stop Smoking Service), Trading Standards and Communications with other work to prevent young people from taking up smoking and help those who have already started to quit. You can read more about [Kick Ash](#) on their website.

The Secretary of State for Health, Andrew Lansley MP, and Deborah Arnott, the Chief Executive of ASH (Action on Smoking and Health) were amongst the panel of VIPs who attended a 'Kick Ash Question Time' event at Swavesey Village College in September. Mentors had the opportunity to ask the panel questions and gain their views on topical matters regarding smoking, such as the possible introduction of plain packaging for cigarettes. The event was very positive and a great opportunity for young people to convey their feelings about tobacco to Government.

Checking food descriptions in restaurants

Over the past three months we have visited a random selection of 10 pubs and restaurants in Cambridge to check that the food they are serving matches the description eg. claims that food is 'British', 'organic', 'home made' and 'free range' as customers tend to pay a premium for such foods.



This sample found that at a few of the restaurants there were some issues with the inaccurate claims, even though they had been given advance notice that we would be visiting. As a result we will be undertaking additional work in the other districts to identify further issues, and will address any problems with the businesses concerned.

Raising awareness of cancellation rights amongst traders

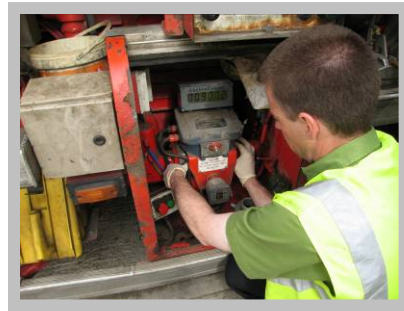
We frequently come across traders who are not aware of the need to give cancellation rights to customers when they agree to contracts at home for over £35.



As a result we carried out an educational project in the county to advise businesses about the requirement. Information was provided at trade suppliers in the county and 65 traders were spoken to in person. Across the board we found very low levels of knowledge and we will therefore be expanding the project. This will help to protect consumers from pressure sales and give them time to consider things carefully before going ahead with an expensive purchase or piece of work. The educational work also protects traders from the risk of non-payment by customers. More information for traders is available on our [webpages](#).

Checking you are getting the right measure of central heating oil

With winter approaching, those with oil central heating systems will be starting to think, and even worry, about the cost of buying oil to keep their homes warm. We realise this, and to make sure you are at least getting what you pay for, each year the meters on the oil delivery tankers are checked by us to ensure customers are getting the correct measure of heating oil.



Farm inspections

Trading Standards work includes ensuring that food entering the food chain is safe to eat. 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.



We have been carrying out a project focusing on grains, visiting some of the producers in the county. This is 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 have also been visiting livestock farms to ensure that the animal feed is being stored hygienically before being fed to animals. This is a large piece of work being funded by the Food Standards Agency and will be continuing over the next few months.

Tackling the most complained about traders

At our last Tasking Meeting in July we identified 8 traders in the county whom we had either received *serious* complaints about or an *above-average number* of complaints about that we were monitoring, and a further 3 that needed immediate intervention. Out of those 11:



- We have intervened to provide advice to four of them and have received no further complaints from the public since that intervention – issues addressed related to making onerous terms and conditions clearer online, providing refunds to customers, the sale of unsafe products, frequent breaches of contract and the need to improve complaint handling.
- We have continued our investigations into three of the businesses – one relates to the provision of false addresses to prevent claims against them, one relates to fraud and one relates to serious breaches of contract.
- We need to do further research into the activities of a second hand car trader in the county.
- We have one more car trader to visit in order that we can provide advice and information on their obligations
- Two of the businesses have gone out of business

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

Cases in court

Trading Standards has been successful in bringing two market traders to Court for the sale of counterfeit goods.

Malachi Henry, of Walthamstow, admitted selling a counterfeit CD to one of our undercover Trading Standards Officers and offering 3,118 others for sale from his stall at Bourn Bank Holiday Market. On 8th September, at Cambridge Magistrates Court, Mr Henry was given a 12 month community order, 100 hours unpaid work and 36 hours specified work at an attendance centre. He was also ordered to pay £500 costs. Further details are available in our [press release](#).

Harinder Singh, of Hounslow, pleaded guilty to six specimen charges of selling counterfeit goods, including designer handbags and other accessories, at Bourn Bank Holiday market. He was sentenced by Cambridge Crown Court to 11 months jail on each of the charges – to run concurrently and suspended for two years. Mr Singh was also made subject to a Prohibited Activities Order which prevents him from selling clothing or accessories for 5 years. A night time curfew was also imposed. Further details are available in our [press release](#).

Such cases are important to protect the trade of law abiding shops and businesses in Cambridgeshire who work hard to abide by the law.

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

Buy with Confidence approved trader scheme gets the go ahead



In early 2012 Trading Standards will be launching a 'Buy with Confidence' scheme for Cambridgeshire. This is an approved trader scheme, with traders undergoing certain checks by us before being able to join. Residents will be able to access the list of approved traders online or by telephone.

Currently, Trading Standards is launching a recruitment campaign for traders to join the scheme. The focus at this stage is on traders working in the home improvement industry. If you are in business and are interested in finding out more visit the [Buy with Confidence](#) website.

Making sure fireworks don't get into the hands of children

Each year in the UK we hear of accidents caused when young people have got hold of fireworks away from adult supervision and have injured themselves or others. As a result, we carry out 'test purchasing' in local shops every October and early November to check that fireworks aren't being sold to children. On our instruction, and under our covert supervision, we send 15-16 year olds into shops where they attempt to buy fireworks. Any shop that does sell to them is dealt with by Trading Standards or the Police. This work is important to keep young people in Cambridgeshire safe.



We also inspect all retailers of fireworks in the county to ensure they are being stored safely, helping to protect the wellbeing of staff, customers and the surrounding community.

Making sure unsafe alcohol isn't being sold in Cambridgeshire's shops

Following on from our previous test purchasing activities, we have had further reports of counterfeit alcohol entering the region. This alcohol can contain dangerous chemicals, as well as unsafe levels of alcohol content, so it is important it is not offered for sale in Cambridgeshire's shops. To address this, we will be carrying out inspections at shops in the county with the Police and HM Revenue and Customs.

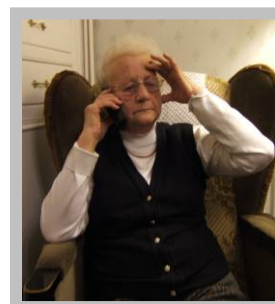
Local foods project



A food project to inspect local food producers – bakers, butchers, farm shops and online sellers of meat and wheat products - will shortly be commencing to check things such as their labelling (allergens, meat content etc) and origin claims (eg ‘British beef’). This will include sausage sampling to tie in with National Sausage Week.

Warning residents about pressure sales of vitamin pills

We have seen a rise in the number of complaints by elderly residents who have bought vitamin pills over the telephone, having been subjected to a high pressure sales call. We have even had allegations that sales people have claimed to be Doctors, and insisted the vitamins were required, leading people to part with many hundreds of pounds. In response to this we will be carrying out a publicity campaign in the county to make older residents aware of this issue. The aim is to discourage them from buying these products over the phone and instead to speak to their own GP. You can view the article on our [news](#) page.



New ‘No Cold Calling Zones’



In streets and neighbourhoods prone to rogue traders, we are able to set up ‘No Cold Calling Zones’ to discourage traders calling at the doors as this is the main way that rogue traders find their work. In the run up to Christmas we hope to set up four new zones, subject to resident agreement, which will involve putting up signs, educating each householder about rogue traders and encouraging them to be vigilant to possible rogue traders in the area. You can read more about No

Cold Calling Zones on our [website](#).

‘Safe in your home’ senior safety days

We work with a number of partner organisations to help older people stay safe in their homes. To support Cambridgeshire Celebrates Age this year, Trading Standards has organised two multi-agency ‘Safe in your Home’ events for the over 60’s in Burwell and Littleport. Stands from the Bobby Scheme, Care and Repair and Trading Standards will be present. As well as having the opportunity to enjoy a bit of social time, attendees will be able to pick up valuable advice and tips to help keep them safe and independent in their

homes, including advice from Trading Standards on how to avoid rogue traders.

Addressing issues of un-hallmarked jewellery



Hallmarking is used so that retailers and customers can ensure they are buying genuine precious metals. It has become apparent that some jewellery being imported from outside the EU is not hallmarked, and shop keepers and customers are sometimes failing to spot this. Without a hallmark there is no way of knowing if it is genuine. As a result, we will be contacting independent jewellers in the county to make them aware of this issue and provide them with advice.

Scams

Computer virus scam

We have received more complaints regarding companies telephoning residents, posing as 'Microsoft' or 'Windows' advising they can see an error or virus on the customer's computer. They offer to dial in to fix it, for which they charge a fee. These companies are not connected with Microsoft or Windows in any way – in fact many of the complaints we receive are from people who don't have computers and who realise straight away it must be a scam. We have issued several press releases on the issue, and the Police have shut down several businesses for these activities, but more continue to emerge. Visit the [Action Fraud](#) website for more information.

Land title scam

Following an increasing number of complaints from the public, the Land Registry has advised us of a scam involving property title. Fraudsters are targeting properties with no mortgage, or where the owners live abroad, and posing as the owner to get the title transferred into their names. The Land Registry is advising owners to keep their contact details up to date on their website so that if they receive an application regarding your property, they can contact you. Visit the [Land Registry](#) website for more information.

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, in addition to those mentioned above, we are looking into the business practices of a further four businesses, with a view to advising or commencing an investigation if appropriate. The issues cover topics such as illegal slaughter, breaches of contract in relation to vehicle hire, insurance sales and pricing, and breaches of contract on the sale of specialist equipment.

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 working in the community.

In addition, we have identified an increase in enquiries regarding the sale of personal protection insurance and also the high pressure selling of vitamins. We will be publishing articles across the village magazines and other specialist publications to provide advice on where to find independent advice on these topics. These articles can be viewed on our [news pages](#).

We are unfortunately unable to identify the traders or trades concerned.

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