



Public Protection Service

Trading Standards

What was new in 2006

December 2006

Operation Liquorice

Trading Standards participated in the multi-agency task force looking at licensed premises on two Saturday evenings. It's Underage Sales Patrol visited a number of shops and also talked to door staff at pubs and clubs in the city centre to discuss the problems they experienced in trying to check ages.

Safety testing

Battery Operated Toys – Injuries from battery operated toys are on the increase due to the batteries overheating, exploding or leaking. We sent several items for testing and one of the samples was found to be dangerous and removed from sale before Christmas. The batteries could reach 100°C and possibly explode.

Unsafe products

Wacky Whistles – Hundreds of dangerous wacky whistles were seized from a street seller in the City Centre. These whistles are very small and can easily get lodged in a child's throat causing them to choke, possibly fatally.

Laser Pointers – Some laser pointers are too powerful to be sold to consumers as they can cause permanent eye damage if misused. Only Class 1 and 2 can legally be sold. Some Class 3 laser pointers were found and removed from sale in the City.

Novelty Lighters – Lighters that look like toys are dangerous products and should not be sold. They end up in the hands of small children and are the cause of many house fires every year. Eight premises in Plymouth were found to be selling child appealing novelty lighters in the run up to Christmas. All have now been removed from sale.

Household Appliances – Energy Labelling

Plymouth Trading Standards have taken part in a national survey organised and funded by DEFRA (the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs) to check that household goods such as washing machines and fridge freezers were correctly marked with energy information. These are the familiar 'rainbow labels' where A is very good and G is very bad.

During the survey 982 energy labels were checked, a problem was noted in 1 in 7 appliances. In half of these the label was missing. Complete details have been sent to DEFRA for a national report.

November 2006

'Buy Wise Be Safe' Safety DVD to be issued to expectant mothers

A DVD produced by all the Trading Standards services in the south west, in partnership, giving useful advice on the purchase and use of baby equipment like pushchairs, car seats, high chairs and stair gates, will be issued to expectant mothers 3 months before their due delivery date by the Maternity Unit at Derriford Hospital.

Sainsbury's Supermarkets Limited

The company pleaded not guilty to a charge relating to the sale of a firework to a person aged 15 and the case was adjourned for a trial in February 2007.

Cheapest car on the Plot

Who wants to buy the cheapest car on the plot? It could be a young driver looking for their first car, it could be a family looking for a cheap second vehicle, it could really be anyone. Do traders skimp on the preparation of their cheapest cars? Is there a risk that as a consequence unroadworthy cars are being offered for sale?

24 Plymouth second hand car traders were visited and a Consultant Vehicle Engineer replicated an MOT examination on the cheapest car on each plot from a £250 K Reg Rover to a £1695 K Reg Mazda.

An alarming 17 of the 24 vehicles examined were found to be unroadworthy with 2 being in a dangerous condition.

The traders generally said that they would not have actually sold the vehicles in the same condition as they were displayed. They would have had corrective work done prior to delivery to the customer. Our concern is that prospective buyers are likely to test drive the vehicle in its unroadworthy state and that it is an offence not just to sell an unroadworthy car but also to offer such a vehicle for sale, for example by displaying it on the garage forecourt.

Traders were advised of the law and training for car traders is going to be offered in January. A follow-up survey will take place next year.

October 2006

Fireworks

There are 45 premises in Plymouth registered for the sale of fireworks. Two have an all year round licence, the rest can only sell in the Bonfire Night season, at New Year and for a few days around the Chinese New Year and Hindu New Year.

Cigarettes

Test purchases using underage volunteers to buy cigarettes were conducted in 36 Plymouth shops and 6 sold. Each premise is being investigated to see what precautions they had in place to avoid this happening.

September 2006

Travel Agents window adverts checked

We visited a range of travel agents in the city and checked the price and availability of holidays displayed in the window. 45% were wrong. The price was incorrect in a third of cases, it had either gone up or just as commonly, gone down. A fifth of the holidays were no longer available.

Whilst window cards are the traditional way of getting customers through the door, the speed of changes to prices and availability of holidays these days means much more frequent checks are necessary on the details displayed.

Back to School with new shoes? Product Standards testing - Leather

Ten pairs of children's leather shoes from shops across Plymouth were tested to see if they were really leather and whether they were labelled properly to show what they were made from; this is usually shown as a pictogram somewhere on the sole or inside the shoe.

Six of the pairs had either incorrect labelling or composition but none were not leather at all. One pair was coated leather when it said it was solid leather and another was the opposite. All the retailers and their local Trading Standards Departments have been informed of the findings so they can be corrected with suppliers.

August 2006

Dangerous toys seized

Yo-Yo Balls – Hundreds of home made Yo-Yo balls were seized from a street seller in the city centre. They were small water filled balloons attached to an elastic band. They didn't meet any of the safety standards and on subsequent testing the water in the balloons was found to contain high levels of harmful bacteria.

Commonly clocked cars

A clocked car is one where the mileage has been reduced so it can be sold at a higher price. Popular family and executive cars are most at risk. In vehicles aged between 3 and 5 years, ex-fleet favourites such as the Vauxhall Vectra, Peugeot 406 and Ford Focus top the list. The incidence of mileage discrepancies in these types of vehicles is no great surprise but family MPVs such as the Ford Galaxy, Renault Espace and Chrysler Voyager are also targets for the clockers.

We visited 23 motor traders and closely examined 52 of these commonly clocked cars offered for sale in Plymouth and their paperwork. None of them were found to have an incorrect mileage.

July 2006

Trading Standards team seize fake designer shoes

1,500 pairs of counterfeit shoes have been seized from a Portuguese lorry disembarking from the Santander ferry. Customs officers at the ferryport contacted us after an inspection of the lorry – which was supposed to be carrying boxes of tiles – uncovered 120 boxes of shoes. Brands involved included Adidas, Lacoste, Gucci and Prada. It appears the shoes were bound for a distributor in the north of England.

Safety testing

Lead in Pencils – We sampled hundreds of pencils and had them tested for heavy metal content in the outer coating. Heavy metals are toxic and build up in the body over time. All the samples were found to meet the required standard.

Trading Standards and Citizens Advice Bureau

As part of our partnership, the Plymouth Consumer Support Network, an Officer from Trading Standards now attends at the CAB in Cobourg House, Mayflower Street every Thursday morning between 10:00 and 12:00 to assist those with consumer related problems. It is working well.

June 2006

Garage fined for misdescribing a gearbox

A Plymouth garage which fitted a reconditioned gearbox but described it as new have been fined a total of £750 and ordered to pay full prosecution costs of £1722.13.

Safety testing

Sun Protective Clothing – Some clothing and hats claim to have a Sun Protection Factor (SPF). We tested a variety of items and all were found to meet the claims. You should look for items with a high SPF of 40+ as the SPF reduces with washing, age and when wet.

May 2006

Sun protection

Sun Protection Leaflets – Thousands of leaflets were distributed to every Year 1 pupil in Plymouth. They offered a range of tips for parents on how to protect their children from the harmful effects of exposure to the sun.

Underage alcohol test purchases

Test purchases were made from 21 premises and 8 of them sold alcohol. £80 fixed penalty notices were served on the sellers and the businesses advised about the precautions necessary to avoid this kind of occurrence happening in the future.

April 2006

Feeding bottles sold in Plymouth come up to the mark

Plymouth mothers can be reassured by the results of a spot check of feeding bottles bought from city shops by Council Trading Standards Officers.

A random sample of feeding bottles, priced between £1.49 and £2.99, were purchased from city centre stores to check they were properly graduated to show accurate measurements for formula feeding.

Too little water would make the formula feed difficult for the infant to digest and too much water could mean the child doesn't get the correct nutrients. The health of low birth weight babies and malnourished infants could be compromised if the feed formulas are not correct because of their underdevelopment.

Plymouth City Council Fair Trading Officer Lynda Braddock said "All feeding bottles checked had the correct and accurate measurement markings on them. During the test it was noted that some of the markings were difficult to measure against because large dots or pear-shaped markings were used instead of raised lines, so extra care should be taken to ensure accuracy when making up a formula feed."

Car dealer fined £1300 with £928 costs

Plymouth motor trader Performance Cars (Plymouth) Ltd was found guilty in Plymouth Magistrates court on 6th April 2006 of selling an unroadworthy vehicle, and supplying the vehicle with false trade descriptions having been made in relation to a 12 month and Full service, on an invoice and service booklet.

The magistrates heard how the vehicle a Mitsubishi Challenger was sold with badly worn brake pads. One brake pad was found to be in such a poor condition it had no visible lining material evident, there was evidence of scoring and damage of the disc. Consultant Motor Vehicle Engineer Patrick Case said, 'There is no doubt that braking efficiency would be significantly compromised by this condition'.

The vehicle was also found to have severely worn anti-roll bar bushes, thus presenting an adverse effect on road holding and handling.

The vehicle had been issued with an MOT shortly before sale by another garage.

Safety testing

Cheap Electrical Items – We sampled some of the cheapest plugs, sockets and extension leads available to see how safe they were. One sample, a two-way socket adapter was found to be of really poor quality and potentially unsafe and was removed from sale.

Bow and Arrow Toys – We sampled several bow and arrow type toys to see how powerful they were. One product was found to be 50% too powerful and could cause serious eye injuries. The product was removed from sale.