



Public Protection Service

Trading Standards

What was new in 2010

Take care when cashing in on the gold rush

Make sure the price is right, say Plymouth's Trading Standards Officers, who have been getting gold valued as part of an exercise to make sure retailers play fair.

The credit crunch has led to the price of gold escalating on international markets as investors look for a safe haven for their cash. This has resulted in a massive increase in the number of high street and internet businesses looking to buy gold, all offering the best deals.

Officers have been in the city centre to check that consumers are being treated fairly when they exchange their gold for cash. Officers visited six premises to get two items of gold – a nine carat bracelet and an 18 carat ring evaluated. The prices offered for the jewellery varied by as much as 70 per cent.

Values given for the bracelet ranged from £60 to £102 - a massive difference of 70 per cent, while the price offered for the ring ranged from £40 to £55, a 37 per cent difference.

As always, the best advice is to shop around before deciding to sell.

Nationwide Scamnesty Campaign

The Council's Trading Standards and the Office of Fair Trading are running the 'scamnesty' campaign from 1 February which aims to help end the scourge of scam mailings, which can mean anything from misleading prize draws to bogus foreign lotteries.

One in 15 adults fall victim to scams involving unsolicited mailings, phone calls or emails designed to con victims out of cash. Anyone who has received a scam mailing in Plymouth is being urged to drop in and post it into a special 'scamnesty post box' in the Civic Centre reception, and in libraries across the city.

The information will be collected and fed into a national database which will be used to help fight the fraudsters. Scam mails can include miracle cures as well as lotteries which encourage people to send small sums of cash for administrative purposes.

Last year around 100 scams were reported to Plymouth Trading Standards officers or Consumer Direct. One Plymouth woman was contacted by Trading Standards officers after being identified on a 'sucker' list found in a Canadian business during a police raid.

The campaign starts on 1 February and runs until 26 February. For more information visit the [Consumer Direct](#) website.

Free training seminar

Plymouth Trading Standards are holding a free training seminar for anyone who carries out work at consumers homes.

Builders, gardeners, landscapers, plumbers, electricians, roofers, tarmac and paving contractors and other tradespeople will all benefit from finding out about the new laws that apply to your business.

The event will be held on Wednesday 31 March 2010 at 6pm in the Astor Room at Plymouth Guildhall.

Warning over cold calling computer scam

Lots of complaints were made to Plymouth Trading Standards in April in response to unexpected telephone calls received from people claiming to be 'online maintenance' or 'online support'. The receiver is told that their computer may have a virus and is advised to purchase what is described as 'virus protection' over the phone. The receiver is then asked to provide their bank details.

Trading Standards warn Plymouth residents never to give personal or bank details to anyone over the telephone or internet following unexpected telephone calls or emails.

Our (small) part in England's World Cup bid

When putting together the 2018 World Cup bid, all prospective cities had to provide evidence that they would tackle the problem of unauthorised counterfeit merchandise being sold, particularly around their club's stadium.

Plymouth Trading Standards said it would be able to assist, and gave examples of our previous policing of concerts such as George Michael and Elton John at Home Park with big crowds and many sellers of unlawfully copied souvenirs.

Buy With Confidence - approved trader scheme

Plymouth City Council's Trading Standards is joining the 'Buy with Confidence' scheme which is open to many different kinds of businesses. Plymouth will initially be encouraging the kinds of businesses that usually contract with their customers in their homes, such as builders, gardeners, plumbers and electricians to sign up.

Residents will be able to choose a business from a list of approved traders with confidence because as part of the application the businesses that sign up will be checked for trustworthiness and fair trading practices. Only if businesses pass all of the stringent checks will they be able to display the 'Buy with Confidence' logo. Whilst they remain in the scheme they will be continually monitored to make sure standards remain high.

Working with the scheme will help consumers steer clear of rogue traders, by only including in the list local businesses that aim to give a good, reliable and customer friendly service. It is hoped that the initiative will be particularly valuable to the elderly and vulnerable who are often the targets of rogue traders.

If you would like to find out more about the scheme or wish to sign up to it then please visit the [Buy With Confidence](#) website.

Approved Traders - Buy with confidence

Plymouth Trading Standards are delighted to welcome our first two members to the 'Buy with Confidence' approved trader scheme.

Barry Greenaway runs a small and very busy gardening and decorating business in Plymouth. 'Greener Ways' offers an old fashioned friendly personal service to all its customers, old and new.

'SML Property Solutions' fit, service and repair gas appliances. Owned by Stephen Launce, who is Gas Safe registered, the business works with both domestic consumers and landlords.

To become members of the scheme both businesses had to pass a rigorous audit to show that they trade fairly and within the law. The businesses will be continuously monitored to ensure that they continue to be eligible to be members.

If you would like to find out more about the scheme or wish to sign up to it then please visit the [Buy with Confidence](#) website.

Under age sales exercise

Trading Standards carried out a test purchase exercise earlier this month involving 30 stores around the city. A 16 year old volunteer was sent into a selection of stores after being instructed to try and buy a can of butane gas lighter fluid. The law states that a person has to be 18 to buy this product.

Last year three stores failed this test. This year we are delighted to report that the volunteer was unable to purchase the butane gas at any of the stores tested.

Pushchair MOT's

Plymouth Trading Standards Officers recently spent a day in the Armada Centre carrying out pushchair MOT's. All of the pushchairs tested on the day were found to be safe.

To help keep your child safe you can carry out the following safety checks at home:

- make sure your pushchair is marked with either BS 7409:1996 or BS EN 1888:2003 - this indicates it is made to the minimum safety standards required by law

- check that the crotch, waist and shoulder straps are securely fixed to the main body of the pushchair
- check the frame for any sharp edges or any open-ended tubes or holes large enough to trap your child's finger
- make sure the wheels are securely attached and test the brakes by making sure they work on a slope or a hill.

Protect yourself from dodgy doorstep traders this summer

That was the warning from Plymouth Trading Standards Officers as they were out and about in the city warning people to beware of bogus sellers as part of a national campaign by the Office of Fair Trading.

The summer months sees an increase in the number of complaints from victims of callous cold callers offering seemingly irresistible deals on home repairs and gardening work. For one week, from 21 July Trading Standards Officers visited various venues around the city including Plymstock Broadway, Plympton Ridgeway and superstores, handing out leaflets, warnings and advice to local people.

The key messages to residents confronted with a doorstep trader are:

- Be wary of special offers or warnings that your house is unsafe
- Don't make snap decisions or sign anything on the spot
- If in doubt contact Consumer Direct on 08454 040506

Crime prevention is better than cure!

Plymouth Trading Standards Officers have been taking part in an initiative to take advice to people's doorsteps. We have teamed up with Crime Prevention and Police Community Support Officers to knock on the doors of houses in areas which are known to have been targeted by rogue traders.

Although some doorstep sellers are honest, there are also rogues who provide poor quality goods or services and are impossible to contact when things go wrong. Our message is very simple, say **no** to doorstep traders. Instead, ask friends or relatives to recommend reputable local traders or check to see if a trade association or an approved trader scheme, such as [Buy with Confidence](#), has any members in your area.

Under-age sale prosecutions

A test purchasing operation using an underage volunteer attempting to buy knives was conducted earlier this year. A 16 year old volunteer was sent into a total of 15 Plymouth shops to check compliance with the age related legislation. You have to be 18 to purchase any kind of knife. The volunteer was allowed to buy a knife in two of the stores.

The two companies concerned, Buyology Ltd and Cookham Ltd trading as Union Street Mini Market, were both recently prosecuted and fined a total of £3500 plus costs between them.

Roadside Car Sales

Following numerous complaints from local residents concerning cars being sold from the roadside, Plymouth Trading Standards monitored many streets throughout the city. Traders who advertise cars for sale on the roadside can commit offences under legislation that is enforced by Trading Standards.

Offences are committed by a trader who parks two or more vehicles within 500 metres of each other advertised for sale. An offence would also be committed if a trader failed to indicate in any advertisement that a vehicle was being sold in the course of a business. The inclusion of 'Trade' or 'T' would satisfy this requirement.

As a result of our investigations Ronald Foster of Keat Street, Plymouth, recently pleaded guilty to breaches of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 (having two or more vehicles for sale within 500 metres) and the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 (failing to declare his trade status) for vehicles parked in Fore Street, Devonport.

Mr Foster received a reprimand from the Magistrates who made it clear to him that they considered the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations serious offences for which he could have faced prison.

Mr Foster was fined £250 for the nuisance parking offence, £450 for each of the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations offences, a £15 victim surcharge and full costs in the sum of £704, totaling £1,869.

Shoppers warned about Counterfeit Goods in run-up to Christmas

Plymouth City Councils Trading Standards Service recently seized a large number of counterfeit toys from a temporary shop in Plymouth. These items have now been sent for safety testing. Many other misdescribed items were also among the haul of seized items.

Shoppers are being advised to always check that toys are labelled with a CE mark and the address of a manufacturer or importer.

If you are concerned that you may have bought a counterfeit or misdescribed item then you can report the matter to Consumer Direct on 08454 040506 or via their website at www.consumerdirect.gov.uk.