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# Essex County Council

## Trading Standards Update

### September 2016

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Welcome to the latest edition of the Trading Standards Update.

The September issue covers some of the preventative work that is undertaken by the service and highlights many issues related to safety.

Working in partnership with internal and external services officers ensure that issues relating to elderly and vulnerable residents are shared so that they can work together to find solutions. Joint visits have taken place with Social Workers and Trading Standards Officers to ensure that residents are safeguarded if they have been targeted by rogue traders, bogus callers or scams.

Working across all the Districts intelligence is being received from members of the public relating to the sale and supply of illegal tobacco and cigarettes. Sniffer dogs have been used by our officers to follow up on intelligence provided and the trained dogs have already found hidden tobacco and cigarettes that would never have been found without their help. You can assist with this project, which is being backed by Public Health, by providing intelligence to the national helpline on 03454 040506.

Once again in this current issue there are several articles related to safety. Goods are available from an infinite number of websites where products are offered at varying prices and from locations all over the world. Buyers need to ensure that if they are purchasing electrical items they need to exercise caution as goods that are supplied directly from countries outside of the EU may not have undergone the required safety testing.

Cllr Anne Brown  
Cabinet Member for Corporate, Communities and Customers

## **IN PARTNERSHIP**

Trading Standards were invited to the 'Good to Great' event organised by Adult Social Care, Operations North. This event took place over 2 days and was attended by 150 social workers and occupational therapists from the North of the county.

Trading Standards gave a presentation, focusing on the safety and wellbeing of older, vulnerable people who are targeted by scams and rogue/doorstep callers.

A case study was included which involved an organised crime gang comprising of over 14 rogue traders who operated in the Clacton and Colchester area between 2009 and 2013 and took more than £1 million from older, vulnerable residents. The main gang members were jailed for a total of over 40 years, with the main perpetrator receiving a 10 year sentence. This complex investigation took over 2 years to conclude.

The Social Workers were advised about the signs to look for and how to report concerns in regard to rogue/doorstep trading and the same for an ongoing Scams project where 2,700 Essex residents have already been identified as responding to scams and more are being added as intelligence becomes available.

Feedback included "Was really good, thank you for coming. It was the most interesting presentation all day, in particular the things to look out for when we go to people's homes, particular triggers/signs etc."

After the event we have received several urgent referrals from Social Care staff and have conducted joint visits with them. The event has forged a strong partnership between Adult Social Care and Trading Standards.

## **BANKING ON IT**

Trading Standards and National Westminster Bank joined forces to advise customers in Benfleet to be aware that people are not always what they seem.

The advice centred on the following:

- Unsolicited callers on the phone purporting to be legitimate organisations such as banks, utility companies or the Police.
- How to protect your identity / money from fraudsters and how not to become a money mule.
- Scams including lottery, prize draws scams, courier scams and clairvoyant scams.
- Computer based fraud and access to computers
- Bogus callers and rogue traders.
- Trading Standards advised 31 older people during the 3 hour event.



We will continue to work with partners to ensure that we provide communities in Essex with information on types of fraud and how victims can protect themselves.

## **BAN ON COLD CALLERS**



Trading Standards acted swiftly in Harwich after receiving a complaint relating to bogus callers. The Housing Manager of the retirement apartments raised her concerns that residents had been cold called after the bogus callers gained access to the building. Within days of receiving the complaints a meeting with the Manager was held and it was agreed to erect No Cold Calling signs. The Zone is now in operation with the full support of the residents. This has

given the staff and residents' greater peace of mind and the residents feel safer and are able to live independently.

### **What is a No Cold Calling Zone?**

A specific area identified as a target for bogus callers, rogue/doorstep traders or bogus callers involving vulnerable residents.

### **What does it involve?**

All residents in the specified area have to agree to be part of the Zone. The residents are then provided with packs of information, including stickers with contact numbers and street signs are displayed in the zone.

## **LICENCED TO THRILL**

Our officers were invited to talk to licensees in Rochford District recently to discuss Fake ID. We were one of five organisations presenting during the event which was aimed at licensees for both the on and off sale trade (pubs/restaurants and also shops). The aim was to ensure that licensees were up to date with current legislation and ensure that they were carrying out all of the required checks.

There were presentations by Catch 22, who talked about Child Exploitation, the Immigration and Sanctions Inspectorate explained about the requirements under 'Right to Work' checks, Essex Fire and Rescue updated attendees on calculating maximum occupancy levels in venues and the Essex Drug and Alcohol Partnership talked about New Psychoactive Substances and drink spiking with Rochford trialling some straws which indicate if a substance has been added to a drink.

The Trading Standards presentation covered under age sales and the importance of checking identity of customers. A premises in Rochford had its licence revoked by the licensing committee recently due to selling alcohol to under age volunteers, so it seemed appropriate to remind the attendees of their responsibilities, what to look out for and the severe penalties of disregarding the legislation. We also updated the attendees about the other areas of their business practices that trading standards would be able to advise or take action on, including illicit tobacco and alcohol, allergen information, if providing food and the issue of proxy sales.

It was a really informative, well run day and attendees received a goody bag with further information to take away to digest at their leisure.

## TOBACCO CONTROL PROJECT

As part of a public health funded tobacco control project – Trading Standards are currently working across all 12 districts engaging with the public through a series of roadshows.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of September the Colchester and Clacton roadshows were carried out – in conjunction with our partners Provide and Wagtails. Provide are an ECC commissioned provider of smoking cessation services and Wagtails operate tobacco detection dogs. Roadshows are an opportunity to inform residents across Essex about our work to inhibit the supply of illicit tobacco and to come along and meet the fantastic dogs that we utilise for this work. Our project is intelligence led and Essex Residents are critical in helping identify where illicit tobacco or cigarettes are being sold. The tobacco detection dogs also form a vital part of the identification of illicit tobacco as in nearly all cases the tobacco is very sophisticatedly concealed.

The Roadshows are normally held during the morning and are followed up in the afternoon with enforcement work based on the intelligence received.

In Colchester Bertie from Wagtails identified a concealment of illegal tobacco behind a false wall in the storeroom of a newsagent. Officers discovered over 3660 cigarettes and a little pot of insect repellent designed to cover the smell of the tobacco in case officers visited with detection dogs.... but Bertie was just too good at his job! Have a look at our press coverage here: [http://m.gazette-news.co.uk/news/14742919.VIDEO\\_Thousands\\_of\\_fake\\_or\\_illegal\\_cigarettes\\_uncovered\\_in\\_town\\_centre\\_raids/#comments-anchor](http://m.gazette-news.co.uk/news/14742919.VIDEO_Thousands_of_fake_or_illegal_cigarettes_uncovered_in_town_centre_raids/#comments-anchor)

In Clacton officers visited a known premises fairly early in the day and found nothing... but having the distinct feeling that they hadn't been quick enough decided to re-visit the shop during the afternoon and lo and behold... a large concealed panel held in place by extremely strong magnets revealed the tobacco that had been restocked once officers had left the shop in the morning. See our coverage in the Clacton and Frinton Gazette [http://www.clactonandfringtongazette.co.uk/news/clacton\\_frinton\\_news/14747384.Bertie\\_sniffs\\_out\\_hundreds\\_of\\_illicit\\_cigarettes\\_in\\_a\\_series\\_of\\_raids/](http://www.clactonandfringtongazette.co.uk/news/clacton_frinton_news/14747384.Bertie_sniffs_out_hundreds_of_illicit_cigarettes_in_a_series_of_raids/)

Please pass on any intelligence relating to illicit tobacco to our national helpline via 03454 040506



## FANCY A SNIFTER

An operation by Essex Trading Standards to alert the public to the dangers of illegal tobacco was followed by visits with sniffer dogs to local shops. During one such visit a quantity of wine was seized which was suspected of being counterfeit. The owner could not produce receipts for the wine to confirm where he had purchased it from, a requirement for all food to show traceability. The 450 bottles will now be destroyed.

## THOUSANDS OF DANGEROUS ELECTRICAL PRODUCTS DETAINED AND DESTROYED BY ESSEX TRADING STANDARDS

A recent examination of an imported consignment of electrical products by Essex Trading Standards Officers has resulted in more than two thousand unsafe items from entering the supply chain.



Officers received intelligence from the National Trading Standards Imports Team at Suffolk, that the mixed consignment of electrical items, including a thousand wax heaters (for hair removal purposes), and a thousand power cable sets and travel adaptors were being held at a customs clearance warehouse in Witham. Essex Trading Standards Officers immediately visited the warehouse and based on their initial examination of the products, detained the whole consignment due to safety concerns, preventing their release to the UK importer.

Subsequent testing of the electrical items confirmed that they were dangerous and failed to meet European Safety Standards on a number of points including poor internal wiring which could result in arcing/short circuit, failing to provide adequate protection against electric shock and that the plugs and fuses were counterfeit. In addition, the importer was not able to provide any of the technical documentation or compliance information required by the legislation when importing electrical items. All of the potentially lethal products have now been securely destroyed under the supervision of officers from the service.

## HAIR TODAY, GONE TOMORROW



We received a complaint from a consumer regarding an electrical product she had recently purchased on eBay. She had not used the product, but upon receiving it she was rightly concerned that it did not have a UK plug. The product, an Electric Hair Thermal Treatment Steamer, had most of us stumped as to what it is actually supposed to do... The instructions accompanying the product ‘helpfully’ state in broken English that you should “clean the hair with shamp<sup>ll</sup>” (sic), then “cover the hair with a wet towel, put on the hair treatment cap”, switch it on and “heat the hair for 20 mins”! This was enough to ring serious alarm bells and the product was immediately collected from the consumer and sent away for a full safety assessment.

An interesting note was that the consumer had assumed, because she had purchased the product from eBay, that the supplier was based in the UK. This is not always the case and, as with Amazon Marketplace, it is easy to purchase products directly from sellers who are based all over the world. In this instance, it actually turned out that she had purchased the product directly from a seller in China. It had cost her £4.59, *including* delivery all the way from China!

On the basis that the product was not provided with an approved 13A standard UK 3 pin plug, or suitable conversion plug, we were able to get the listing immediately removed from eBay. Then, once the safety assessment was received it confirmed our initial thoughts – the product failed nearly every test and poses a serious risk to the health and safety of consumers. Some of the more worrying failures included:

- Bare wires protected from contact only by the material of the hood. Should this become wet (which is actively encouraged by the ‘instructions’) there is a risk of shock.
- The cord on this sample was connected to the heating element by simply twisting the conductors together. The joint was then unacceptably covered with loose fitting adhesive tape.
- There is access to live parts
- There is no overheat protection.
- There is no safety information or warnings.

Following receipt of the safety assessment we are now in the process of completing a RAPEX cross-border recall to ensure that this dangerous product is no longer sold across the European market. Without the resources to carry out such work by Trading Standards items like this could be endangering lives across Essex, the UK and Europe.

## **BANG OUT OF ORDER**



Trading Standards are working in partnership with Harlow Community Safety Team again this year, to ensure that businesses selling fireworks do not sell to persons under the age of 18. Officers will be carrying out advice visits to all licensed premises in the Harlow district prior to enforcement action taking place to ensure that all retailers are aware of their legal obligations. Test purchasing will be carried out with a person of 18 to ensure that young people are being asked for I.D. to verify their age. Any businesses that sell fireworks to our 18 year old test purchaser will be revisited and tested with a volunteer under the age of 18.

Last year 100% of the businesses were tested and no sales took place. This was very encouraging, but we believe that it is crucial that the message is reinforced to traders to avoid casualties which occur every year from the sale and misuse of fireworks.

Another critical element of the project is to check and ensure that all premises are complying with the legal storage requirements. People tend to forget that fireworks are explosives and if large quantities are stored incorrectly and an incident does occur this can potentially lead to the loss of life or property.

## **KEBAB SHOPS SUPPLY UNSAFE FOOD AGAIN!!**

Five kebab shops were revisited following poor results from test purchases previously carried out as part of an allergen project earlier this year. We had been supplied kebabs with soya present even though we specifically requested soya free. We covertly resampled from the premises concerned and these samples were then sent for formal analysis. The Public Analyst reports determined that soya was present as an ingredient in 3 out of 5 cases.



When investigating further, officers discovered that, at two premises, the kebab meat was correctly labelled from the supplier with the allergen soya highlighted as an ingredient in the food. However, staff serving our undercover officers failed to understand the importance of checking the ingredients or failed to give any allergen information when asked for a 'soya free' kebab due to having soya allergy. The sale of unsafe food is a serious breach of Food safety legislation. Changes in food law in 2014 now require catering establishments to have a good understanding of listed allergens and the handling and control of these within the workplace.

Trading Standards have been advising caterers on this, but have serious concerns that the message still isn't getting across in some establishments. Trading Standards will be taking formal action against these businesses so that this reinforces the message that food safety has to be taken seriously as in certain circumstances as highlighted recently in national media people lose their lives when Takeaway owners fail to take their responsibilities seriously.

## TEETH WHITENING PENS LEAVE TEETH WITH LESS LUSTRE



Consumers wanting a Hollywood smile at Cricklewood prices should be careful not to end up with teeth that end up feeling rougher and looking less lustrous than before they started. According to aesthetic dentists, buyers can get less than they bargained for if using over-the-counter teeth whitening products that contain the ingredient *sodium chlorite*. Given the legal restrictions on peroxide in dental bleaches available to consumers, it is tempting to be sucked in by “peroxide free” claims and end up with a teeth whitening product that contains the active ingredient sodium chlorite which may provide initial good results but which in the longer term can lead to “etching” of teeth, loss of lustre (damage to enamel), teeth appearing more discoloured, teeth absorbing more stains than before, teeth feeling rough, and teeth feeling more sensitive.

Such a highly questionable product was recently stopped and examined by Essex' *Border Sheriffs* working at Stansted Airport to check for unsafe goods coming into the UK. The Brighter White Teeth Whitening Pens were manufactured in China and had only partial ingredients labelling, with no labelling and no traceability whatsoever on the white plastic pen itself. There was no name and address on the product of a responsible person in the UK or EU, and when asked about the required expert safety assessments for this cosmetic product the importer could only produce a test report for a previous batch on levels of hydrogen peroxide. There was no overall cosmetic product safety assessment to take into account the exposure of the consumer to the chemicals in the pen.



The importer appeared ignorant of the published dangers of sodium chlorite in teeth whitening products, and this batch of 2,100 pens was referred into the safekeeping of the importer's local Trading Standards service for them to provide more detailed advice.

As well as the product's chemical composition, questions must also be asked about the lack of any provided protection for gums when applying the whitening solution to the teeth.

## A BRUSH WITH THE LAW

A consignment of hair straightener brushes were stopped at Stansted as part of a National Trading Standards Safety Project. The products resemble a branded Hair Straightening Brush that retails at around £140 and could be the 'it item' to have at Christmas. The trader was notified that the consignment had been detained pending the results of testing.

The product was tested and found to be unsafe as it was not constructed in accordance with principles of good engineering practice. Wires with only the basic insulation were in contact with the accessible metal tangs of the brush; the plug did not comply with the British Standard, there was no fuse and the product posed a risk of electrocution.



The report was forwarded to the trader and to their local Trading Standards Department who then paid them a visit to provide some much needed advice. The company had apparently recently left the premises with no forwarding address following our intervention. The 216 hair straightener brushes posed a serious risk and have now been destroyed.