

TRADING STANDARDS NEWS

Issue 31

Autumn 2007

Who are Trading Standards?

The Trading Standards Service is part of Wigan Council's Environmental Services Department. Our aim is to achieve a fair, safe and honest trading environment in the borough. Whether you are a consumer or a trader, you are equally important to us.

John Keeps 'Em Out!

John Bolan is nobody's fool. That's what comes with 93 years experience of life and the world.

So when a salesman came calling at John's home in Orrell, he immediately knew something just wasn't right. And thanks to following the right advice from Wigan Council's Trading Standards team the great grandfather could have saved himself and his neighbours a lot of grief and heartache.

John, who lives in a Wigan and Leigh Housing sheltered accommodation scheme, was called to the door recently.

"There was a man at the door with a bag under his arm," explains John. "I never open the door fully to anyone I do not know so I put the chain on and opened a bit and asked what he wanted."

John proudly displays a Wigan Council sign in his front window urging cold callers not to bother knocking but the stranger ignored it and called anyway.

"He said he was selling things but I told him I wasn't interested and sent him on his way," added John.

But that wasn't enough for the community-minded former bakery owner because he decided to keep watching the man as he called at other homes.

"I saw him knock at a door further down and the lady opened the door fully to him," says John. "I know you are

not supposed to do that and I became very worried about what may happen. It seems to be that every day you read in the paper about people who have been duped into letting someone in and then they've had hundreds of pounds stolen. I didn't want to see that happen to anyone."

Ever alert, John keeps a list of useful numbers close to the phone and one quick call later the Orrell community police officers were aware of what was going on. The 'salesman' was picked up close to John's home and detained by police.

It later transpired that he'd been doing the rounds in the community and more people had become suspicious of his behaviour. He had asked one woman for a drink of water and another resident if they lived alone.

Wigan's Chief Trading Standards Officer Julie Middlehurst says: "John did all the right things and we'd like to congratulate him on his quick thinking and concern for others."

"From keeping the chain on his door through to calling the police he followed our advice to the letter and it was thanks to him that this person was detained."

"Sadly bogus callers and distraction burglars tend to



target older and vulnerable people but if everyone followed John's example there'd be a lot less of them around."

The advice from Trading Standards is clear:

Say 'NO' to doorstep callers

"A reputable company or organisation will not mind making an appointment to return at a later time to think or when someone else can be there with you," says Julie. "Never take the chain off the door and do not be afraid to call the police or trading standards if you think they are suspicious."

Wigan and Leigh Housing Chief Executive Ashley Crumbley added: "Wigan and Leigh Housing work closely with the Police and others. Copies of the Trading Standards advice is available from our Area Housing Offices and is being distributed through your Area Housing Forums, Tenants Associations and street reps".

Inside this issue:

Beware the 'Water Board' Man	2
New Tobacco Law	2
Home Improvement Packs	3
Competition Corner	3
Early Warnings and Safety Recalls	4



Fair Play Charter - Are you looking for a reputable garage?

Need a reputable garage to buy a car from or have your car serviced? Visit www.wigan.gov.uk and search for Fair Play Charter or ring 01942 827476 for a list of Wigan members of the Charter, who are committed to fair and honest trading.

Beware the 'water board' man

Doorstep crime watchdogs in Wigan are urging residents to be on their guard following a spate of distraction burglaries in the borough.

The Wigan and Leigh Bogus Caller Group says it has received reports of a number of bogus official burglaries recently. In each case the con-merchants have targeted older and often vulnerable people by passing themselves off as workers from the 'water board'.

In incidents in Lowton and Ince older female residents aged 83 and 90 answered the door to a man claiming to be from the water board. In both cases the man has gone into the house to 'check the pipes'. As the caller kept the homeowner occupied in the kitchen a second man has crept upstairs to rifle through belongings and steal jewellery.

Both men wore jeans and t-shirts and drove a white Transit/Peugeot Boxer-type van.

Wigan Council's Trading Standards is a key member of the Bogus Caller Group. Chief Trading Standards Officer Julie Middlehurst says:

"Distraction burglaries where the culprit claims to be from the water board are the most frequent type of doorstep crime we deal with. On average we get an incident like this once a month but we are particularly concerned that we have had four in one week.

"The first thing to say is that you should immediately become suspicious if some calls at your house

claiming to be from the 'water board' because there is no such thing. If the caller is genuine then they will say they are from United Utilities."

Julie adds: "The second thing to say is that no genuine official would need to go upstairs in your home."

But the key message from Trading Standards to all residents is – if you have any doubts at all, don't let them in.

"Companies like United Utilities usually inform you in advance that they are coming to call," says Julie. "They also operate a password system so you can check they are genuine when they arrive. Genuine callers will carry ID and will not mind you checking it with their head office before letting them in. Remember to use a number out of the phone book, not one that might be on the card they give you."

The advice from Trading Standards is to always keep your chain on when answering the door:

- Talk to people through the door, rather than opening it when they knock.
- Ask who they are before opening the door, then keep the door on the chain until you've seen their identification
- Make sure your back door is closed and locked before answering your front door - thieves have been known to work in pairs through the back while the other knocks on the front door.

Julie adds: "These criminals target older, vulnerable people and they know



exactly what they are looking for so we'd urge everyone to be careful. If you have any doubts at all about someone at your door do not let them in and call the police."

- For advice on doorstep crime and other consumer issues call Consumer Direct on 08454 040506 (calls charged at local rates).
- United Utilities customers can register their own unique password with the company by calling 0845 746 1100.

The Wigan and Leigh Bogus Callers Group is made up of Wigan Council, the police and other agencies. The group operates an 'early warning' system meaning that any reports of doorstep crime are circulated quickly by e-mail. In this way the word can quickly be spread to those most at risk to warn them of the danger. Anyone who wants to receive these early warnings can e-mail Wigan Council's Trading Standards team at: ts@wigan.gov.uk

New Tobacco Law



From Monday 1st October 2007 the law relating to the sale of tobacco will change.

The legal age for sales will be raised and retailers must ensure their customers are 18 or over before selling them cigarettes and other tobacco products, rather than 16 or over as the law currently states. It is worrying that most addicted adult smokers began as teenagers. Even more worrying is the fact that someone who starts smoking at 15 is three times more likely to die from cancer due to smoking, than someone who starts in their mid 20's. This change in the law

follows on from the introduction of the Smokefree legislation in July 2007 and it is hoped it will prevent children and young people from starting to smoke in the first place, therefore avoiding the serious health dangers. Wigan Trading Standards will be supporting tobacco retailers in the borough by providing advice and free statutory notices, to ensure they and their staff are fully prepared for the changes. By raising the age at which cigarettes can be bought, in line with alcohol and fireworks laws, it will simplify the various legislation which controls underage sales of some goods and

retailers will be able to apply the same rules for all. The Department of Health has also set up a dedicated website, tobaccoagechange.co.uk, which contains information on the legislation and useful advice. A communications campaign will be running to raise awareness among teenagers of the changes, so that no-one is caught by surprise when the new law comes into force. Once in place Trading Standards will be carrying out test purchases with young volunteers to ensure that retailers in the borough are complying.



Home Information Packs

If you're thinking of selling up and moving you may now need to have a Home Information Pack for your property.

From August 1, the government's much-anticipated Home Information Pack (HIP) legislation came into force, for homes with four or more bedrooms, and from 10th September 2007 homes with 3 bedrooms also require a HIP. Wigan Council's Trading Standards team is now urging homeowners and estate agents alike to make sure they know what their responsibilities are. Wigan Council's Chief Trading Standards Officer Julie Middlehurst explains: "The original intention behind the home information packs was to help reduce the number of property sales that fall through.

"The government felt that if more information was presented to the buyer up front, there would be less chance of something being discovered later on which would cause the sale to fail."

The packs were also intended to speed the buying process up and place more emphasis on energy efficiency in homes. It was originally intended that the packs would have a structural survey of the property at its core but changes mean that this now only needs to be included on a voluntary basis.

HIPs need to include:

- HIP index – this provides a checklist for sellers, buyers, estate agents and other organisations.

- Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) – this indicates how energy efficient a home is on a scale of A to G.
- Sale Statement – this provides basic information about the site, including the address and status of the property (freehold or leasehold).
- Standards Searches – This provides information about local land charges, any planning application affecting the property and information about drainage and water supplies.

Evidence of Title – This proves the seller owns the property.

The pack must also include a copy of the lease.

The cost of the HIP has been estimated at between £400 and £700. The Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) must be completed by a trained assessor and is valid for a year.

Julie says: "It will normally be the responsibility of seller's estate agent to commission the HIP and up until the end of the year a property can still be marketed as long as it can be proved that one has been commissioned. "Estate agents will also need to sign up to an approved HIP complaints redress scheme as well."

She adds: "If a house with three or more bedrooms is put on the market without a HIP then the estate agent could face a fine of up to £200, however we hope to work with both the borough's estate agencies and the

public to ensure everyone is aware of the new rules."

The HIP requirements for smaller properties will be phased in as the number of assessors increase.

- To find out more you can visit the government's website www.homeinformationpacks.gov.uk

- Email : homeinfo@communities.gsi.gov.uk

- Write to:
Home Ownership Policy Branch
Department for Communities and Local Government
2/J9 Eland House
Bressenden Place
London,
SW1E 5DU

- Or call: 020 7944 4400

If you have a particular local query about HIPs you can ring Wigan Trading Standards on 01942 827476

Energy Performance Certificate

Energy Performance Certificates tell you how energy efficient a home is on a scale of A-G. The most efficient homes - which should have the lowest fuel bills - are in band A.

The Certificate also tells you, on a scale of A-G, about the impact the home has on the environment. Better-rated homes should have less impact through carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions.

The average property in the UK is in bands D-E for both ratings. The Certificate includes recommendations on ways to improve the home's energy efficiency to save you money and help the environment.

Competition Corner

Trading Standards education programme kicks off this month, with four competitions for schools in the coming year.

First off the mark is the ever popular Value For Money? Or Easter Egg competition as it's more commonly known. It's now in its 12th year, and hundreds of children look forward to comparing three chocolate eggs to see which come out tops for value for money. The children are seldom fooled by fancy packaging and learn a valuable lesson.



Playsafe is a Trading Standards Competition that challenges youngsters in two age groups 6-11 and 12-17 to

design a toy that's suitable for children aged 3-7. Not only do they have to put their ideas on paper, but also provide extra information about safety features, play and development benefits, where to use the toy and whether it's suitable for children with special needs.

The Young Consumer is a competition to find the country's most knowledgeable young consumers. Pupils aged



14-17 are tested on food, health and safety, the environment, travel, managing money and the European dimension.



The Consumer Challenge Quiz is specifically designed for children with

learning difficulties, and is very popular with children and teachers alike. It helps raise awareness of consumer rights and issues, but in a fun way, that emphasises learning life skills rather than fierce competition.

Entry forms will be sent out to schools in the next few weeks, and if teachers or pupils would like to know more, please contact Jean Glover on 01942 827476.

Early Warnings

Beware cold callers with glossy brochures to show you, or with professionally signed vans...they may not be all that they seem.

A man was cold called in Lowton by two men, accompanied by a young boy. They showed him a glossy brochure advertising UPVC fascias and offered to replace his for a bargain price and the promise of a 10 year guarantee. The man agreed and paid £220, but did not secure a receipt for the money with a home address. Unfortunately the fascias supplied were very poor quality. Nothing like the photographs he was shown! And the workmanship was shoddy. The address he was given did not exist, and he is still waiting for the promised guarantee. The men said they were father and son, and the father was described as 5'10" in his early 40's with short dark hair and was unshaven. The son is described as having a slight Irish accent, 5'9" tall and a little plump, with fair hair. The boy was aged 5 or 6. They drove a Ford Transit type van in metallic silver.

Trading Standards advise all residents to say NO to doorstep callers, if something is wrong with the work they do, you have very little chance of being able to contact them to come back and rectify shoddy work or claim money back.

High Price Cleaning

A 75 year old woman with memory problems, and living alone in sheltered accommodation, was called on by a man who claimed to be delivering cleaning materials she had ordered some months before. The man entered her home and asked for a drink of water for his wife and child who he said were waiting outside for him. He left an assortment of cleaning products (bleach, disinfectant, dusters etc) and charged her almost £50. The goods were probably worth only a fraction of that amount, between £10 and £15. She was unable to give a description of the man, except to say he wore a bright lemon coloured jacket.

Trading Standards advise all residents to ask for proof of ID before allowing anyone to enter your home, and to check out any story you are told by ringing the company the caller claims to represent. Always answer the door with the security chain in place, and do not allow anyone to distract you into leaving them alone in your house.

Bogus Waterboard Official....again!

Two men called on an 83 year old woman and told her they were from United Utilities and needed to check the water. Whilst one man checked the pipes in the kitchen, the 2nd male searched the rooms in the house, stealing 2 ornaments and a lottery ticket. Another man was seen waiting in a van outside. The men were described as white, with Irish accents and wearing jeans and t shirts. One was mid 20's and stocky build with fair hair, 5' 8" tall and wearing a green and white striped t-shirt. The van was a white transit type van with an 06 registration plate. This type of con is happening nearly every week in Wigan.

Trading Standards urge all residents to be wary of any "officials" calling unexpectedly. If the callers are genuine they will show you ID and you should check this out by ringing United Utilities. It is also possible to register a unique password with them so all genuine officials can prove they are genuine, just call 0845 746 1100.

United Utilities say none of their staff should ever ask to go upstairs to check water, and you should not allow anyone entry until you are sure who they are. Always answer the door with the security chain on and close it while you make enquiries. A genuine caller will be happy to wait or even call back by appointment.

Safety Recalls



Various Mattel Magnetic Toys Including some Polly Pocket, Batman, Doggie Daycare

The magnets in these products can be swallowed, aspirated or placed by a child in their nose or ears possibly leading to internal medical problems. Images show examples of affected products please contact **Mattel Consumer Response** to determine if your product is affected. **Mattel UK Ltd., Vanwall Business Park, Maidenhead, SL6 4UB**

Telephone 0808-234-8437

Website www.service.mattel.com/uk



Reebok DEMON 18" BICYCLE - JJB Line code: 815099 01 180

If you have purchased one of these bicycles since May 2006, Please immediately discontinue riding or using this bicycle in any way, and return it immediately to your nearest JJB Sports bike dept. (See website, www.jjbsports.com to identify your nearest JJB store). The returned product can either be exchanged for a bike of equivalent value, or for a full refund. If you have any queries, please speak to the Reebok Demon Customer Service Hot Line at Monterey UK Tel: 07000 845 845. **Only the Reebok Demon 18" frame model is affected.** No other Reebok bicycles are affected.

Puncture Repair Kit Sold at Instore/Poundstretcher - Product Code: 186479

As a result of ongoing tests it has been found that the kits that contain the "Red Sun" glue are being recalled due to possible excess levels of hazardous chemicals in the glue.

Customers who have purchased this item or received it as a gift should stop using it immediately and are advised to return this product (containing the "Red Sun" glue) immediately to any Instore/Poundstretcher store where a full refund will be given.



HOW TO CONTACT US

Environmental Services
Trading Standards Section
Town Hall
Library Street
Wigan
WN1 1YN

Consumers Phone 08454 04 05 06
Traders Phone: 01942 827476
Fax: 01942 488405
Email: ts@wigan.gov.uk

If you would like to receive this newsletter by e-mail— send a message to ts@wigan.gov.uk to register your name and e-mail address

If you are a member of a group or association and would like to receive a regular supply of this free newsletter Ring Lynn on 01942 827660

We're on the Web

<http://www.wigan.gov.uk/services/businessregeneration/tradingstandards>