

consumer

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## Welcome from Clive



Welcome to our first newsletter for 2009. I hope the year finds you well and is treating you kindly.

Since our last edition we have all seen and even experienced the worsening economic situation, both here and abroad.

Accordingly, it has become even more important for consumers to have access to high quality and impartial advice to help them get the best value for their money and ensure they know how to avoid losing out to rogues and scammers.

It's always very satisfying for us to hear the outcomes to our calls and, to this end I'm pleased to report that last year more than 2,500 consumers called us back to let us know that they had followed our advice and resolved their cases to their satisfaction. There were some particularly good outcomes for some as the following four examples testify:

Mr Cottam from Devon who recovered £21,500 after a faulty new car purchase.

Mrs Brown from Swindon who received a full refund of £2,695 after being misled when buying an electric wheelchair.

Mr Rudge from Devon who recovered £2,941 after signing up for pottery after attending a presentation.

Mrs Ellis from Paignton who received a £569 refund when tickets for the Reading Music festival failed to materialise.

We have many more such examples where consumers were so happy with the service they received from us that they've given permission to use the case in press releases to highlight the problem – and its resolution – to others.

The need to provide quick and efficient access for everyone to consumer advice is vital and we are indebted to all our partners for helping spread the word. To help achieve this we have produced a DVD with case scenarios and tips and advice, and also provide regular talks to a wide and diverse range of groups throughout the South West.

If you think this could be of interest to you, please contact Kate Cook to discuss your needs. Any feedback on the service or suggestions for future newsletters are also welcome.

Meanwhile, I wish you all well as Consumer Direct continues to help increase the availability of consumer advice to all parts of the community, including local businesses from which we also welcome enquiries.

My best wishes to you all for Easter – our next issue will be in July.

Clive Kenyon  
Centre Manager Consumer Direct South West

## Some important consumer law developments you may have missed in 2008....

From October, any salesperson who calls at your home, either at your request or following a telephone call or leaflet/advert you may have read, then you must be given seven days to "cool off" and think about your decision.

This should be notified to you verbally and in writing.

In May, legislation was introduced to prohibit certain unfair commercial practices.

For instance, a salesperson must leave when asked to do so and not make claims that their job is in jeopardy if the sale is not made.

Nor can it be stated that the offer is for a limited time, and full information must always be supplied – it should not be unclear, ambiguous nor deceptive.

Whilst these commercial practices give the consumer no rights in law for redress, it is an offence for the trader to use them.

Consumer Focus was born on 1st October, offering assistance to all consumers requiring help with energy suppliers and postal complaints.

Estate Agents must now belong to an Ombudsman scheme whereby complaints can be dealt with independently.

## Contact Consumer Direct

For consumer advice call 08454 04 05 06



If you are planning any events where Consumer Direct South West could help both yourselves and the consumer – please let us know as we will consider ANY invitation.

We have attended tenants forums, conferences, Neighbourhood Watch meetings, local advice centres - you name it, we will consider it - we will come to you AND FOR FREE where possible.

For any other enquiry, to arrange a visit, request a talk, obtain leaflets, literature or newsletters or to be added to our email distribution list, call

Kate Cook on 01209 720281 or email [kcook@consumerdirect-southwest.gov.uk](mailto:kcook@consumerdirect-southwest.gov.uk)

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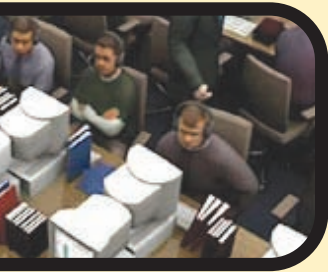
Consumer Direct South West is delivered in partnership by SWERCOTS Limited, the Office of Fair Trading and local authority Trading Standards services across the South West of England.



## Scams: their effects and need for awareness

2008 saw calls to Consumer Direct both regionally and nationally continue to rise, particularly where callers' believed there to be a whiff of a scam.

In February, the OFT Scambusters team, in partnership with local Trading Standards and Consumer Direct, held the second "Scamnesty", where consumers were able to drop off any misleading mailings and to report any scam issue, even if it's merely a suspicion and no money has been sent.



One of the saddest calls Consumer Direct South West received last year was from a son whose father, 83 years old and now hospitalised, had parted with over £230,000 to a "boiler room" scam.

"Boiler Room" scams are increasing, and involve high-pressured selling by supposed financial institutions (in reality, a sweat-shop type environment, usually overseas and driven by task masters) offering stocks and shares for sale in new, up-and-coming

companies. Callers (these scams are always conducted by telephone) are assured that if they get in now they will make a fortune later when the company takes off.

Sadly, the stocks and shares prove useless as often no such companies exist or have been fraudulently set up just for this reason.

Recovery of monies is almost impossible.

Lottery wins and prize draw scams continue and calls to Consumer Direct to report them are crucial in the fight to stop them.

Information is always shared with enforcement authorities both in the UK and accordingly across all overseas borders.

Consumer Direct and Trading Standards have been championing the Scamwise campaign for some time. Aimed at promoting the awareness of scams in all their guises, you can order SAY NO TO DOORSTEP TRADERS stickers and other related information from Consumer Direct.

The stickers can be applied to your door warning off any cold caller.

*Please call 08454 04 05 06 to order yours now.*



## Watch out for clothing collections at this time of year.

As winter bites and spring is uncoiled, our wardrobes and drawers bulge with clothes and footwear we may no longer require.

We all have plastic bags and leaflets drop on our doormats, but take time out to read them closely.

They may be commercial and profit-making rather than for charitable causes.

If you wish to check a charitable status, or are unsure about the agency asking you to leave unwanted clothes outside for collection, then call Consumer Direct.



**Consumer Direct telephone number  
08454 04 05 06**



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## Some of the more unusual calls we have taken in the past few months.....

Not every call we receive is about a faulty TV or broken down car. These calls are the bread and butter enquiries that are the lynchpins on which we rely and we are always grateful to receive them.

However, it pays to expect the unexpected, as the following case scenarios show. Every caller still received the same clear and practical advice.

The caller from Plymouth who bought a snake, which she was told would be passive and an ideal pet for children. It was aggressive and the consumer threw a hissy-fit with the seller.

The caller from Gloucestershire who for a joke at Christmas signed up to a "quickie divorce" website citing his parents for divorce.

The local hotel in Bulgaria that claimed to be a 4 star. On arrival the caller and family were greeted by security guards with stun guns, the towels vanished (staff were taking them and charging guests) whilst a film being made in the reception area was not the type you would expect to see following the Queen's Speech on Christmas Day.



The caller from Bristol who took her dog to a grooming parlour. It seems whilst left there that the dog fell pregnant.

Talking of dogs, another caller purchased a Dalmatian after seeing an advert online. She was assured that it was a two year-old, good with children, great behaviour on a lead and no problem with cats.

It seems that after getting home with the animal, and checking with the previous owner, it was, in fact, six years old and that it had been sold on because it had attacked a child, was not at all house-trained and could not stand cats.

The caller who booked a horse and carriage for her wedding day last Summer. The trader was informed that the hill to the church was steep. Sadly the horse straps broke and everyone, including the bride and groom, had to get out and push, even flagging down the bridesmaids' limo to join in.



The wedding started 55 minutes late – and guests were leaving in the belief the wedding was off.

To make matters worse – the reception was a disaster with key guests incorrectly seated, the food was awful and the bridal suite already in use.

From face lifts in Prague to multiplying rabbits, weather forecast requests and time checks...we are happy to help whenever we can.

Finally, the internet purchase of a stab-proof vest that wasn't.