

# *Information Network Bulletin*

*Edition 1 - 2022/23*

Welcome to the latest edition of the Information Network Bulletin brought to you by Croydon Council's Trading Standards team.

In addition to general news from the team, it includes details of some of the latest scams and fraud alerts which we have become aware of in recent months.

We hope that you find it useful.



There have been over 640 electrical products recalled since 2007. Registering your product is important so that if the manufacturer finds out that the product is faulty or dangerous then you can be contacted regarding this matter. Unfortunately, product recalls do not have a high response rate, and so the electrical charity, Electrical Safety First, has developed a voicepp for Alexa and Google Nest that allow users to check if a product has been recalled. A link to their website for more information is below:

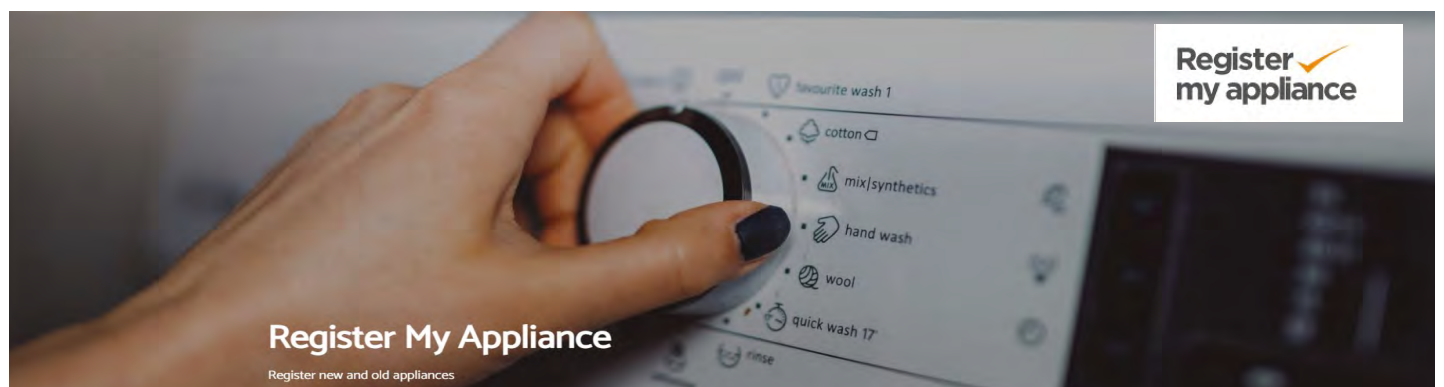
[www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/what-we-do/consumer-campaigns/online-campaigns/voice-skills-for-alexa-and-google-nest/](http://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/what-we-do/consumer-campaigns/online-campaigns/voice-skills-for-alexa-and-google-nest/)

If you would like to search online to see if a product has been recalled or is subject to safety actions the link to the Electrical Safety First website is below:

<https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/product-recalls/product-recall-alerts/>

Registering any of your household appliances can be completed at the following website:

[www.registermyappliance.org.uk/](http://www.registermyappliance.org.uk/)



## **World Anti-Counterfeiting Day**

World Anti-Counterfeiting Day this year was on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2022. The purpose of the day is to highlight the negative impact counterfeit and pirated goods have on our health, safety and security. A recent report estimated that 3% of international trade consisted of the trade in counterfeit and pirated goods. As well as the traditionally counterfeited goods such as watches, fashion items, shoes and sportswear, items such as medicines, medical equipment, car parts, toys, food, cosmetics, and household electrical goods are increasingly being counterfeited and putting the health of consumers at serious risk. Electrical Safety First is a UK leading charity on electrical safety, which has concerns about the growth of counterfeit products.



They report that 30% of consumers who have purchased fake products are buying them from third party online marketplaces, and 6% of buyers were unable to differentiate between a fake and an original.

Products likely to suffer from counterfeiting include:

**Alcohol** – fake alcohol can contain high levels of toxins that can cause blindness, coma and death. Fake alcohol containing methanol can lead to a wide range of health issues and fake alcohol has also been found where ethanol has been replaced by chemicals used in cleaning fluids, nail polish remover and screen wash.

**Fragrance** – counterfeit perfume has been found to contain methanol which can cause skin irritation, harm to eyes and to the nervous system.

**Sunglasses** – fake sunglasses may not provide any protection against ultra-violet rays, leaving the wearer at risk of suffering eye damage.

**Cigarettes** – in China alone, 100 billion counterfeit cigarettes are produced each year, many of which find their way to the UK. Fake cigarettes often contain excessive levels of tar and nicotine and often pose a greater fire risk as they do not include the composition to ensure that a lit cigarette will self-extinguish if not actively smoked.

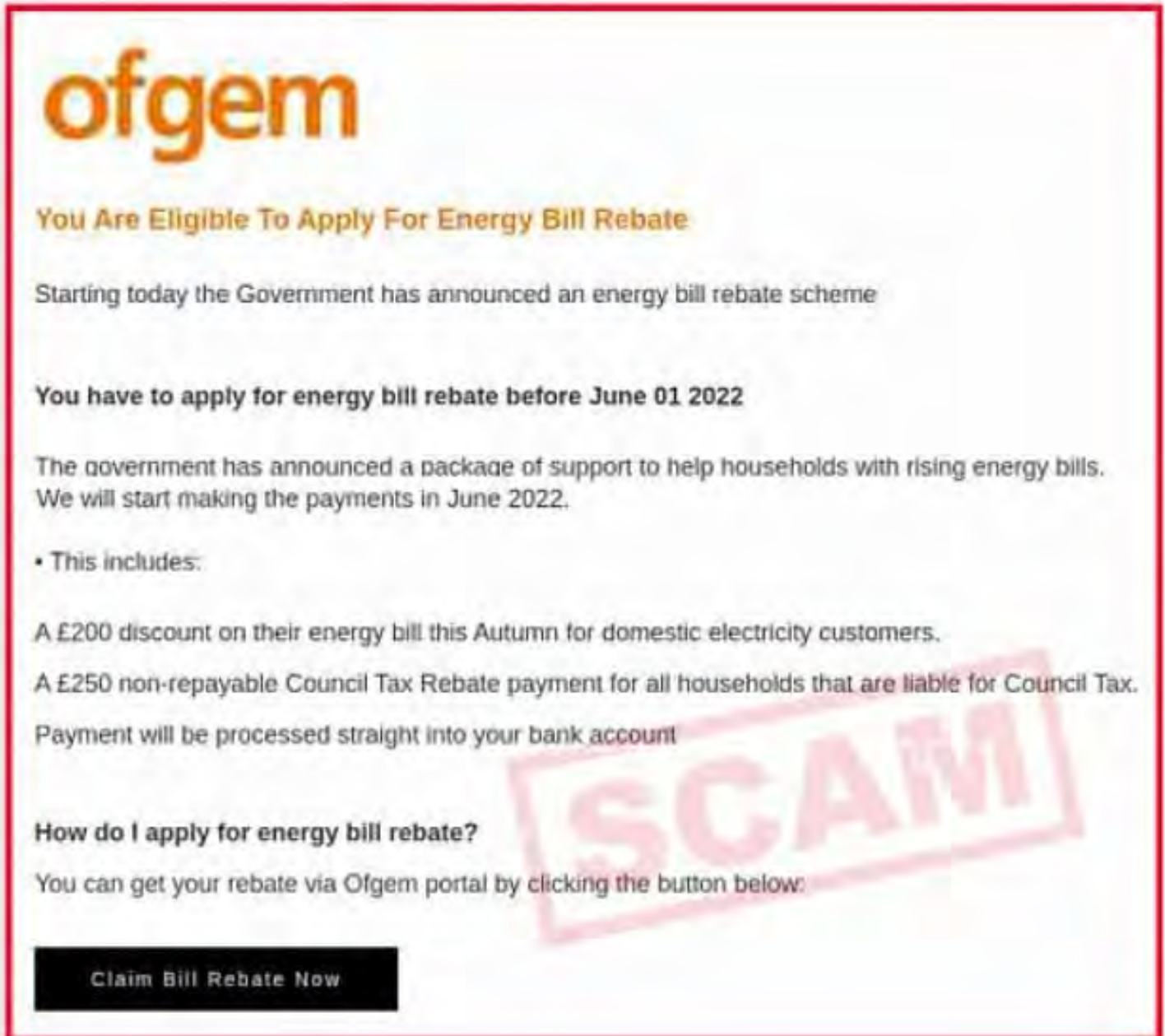
**Toys** – counterfeit toys are on the increase, which are often made of substandard materials and are not subjected to quality checks. They can have sharp edges, faulty and loose parts and dangerous circuits and chargers. In many cases the paint and material used will also contain lead and other toxins.

**Pharmaceuticals** – the World Health Organisation reports that the sale of counterfeit medicines worldwide was worth around \$75 billion in 2018. Now that consumers can buy medicines online has attracted the criminals who can setup sophisticated and illegal websites to attract buyers.

**Soap** – is another target for counterfeiters, with over 50,000 tons being seized in Dover. HMRC estimate that the trade in fake toiletries costs the UK £735 million a year. Fake soap products have not been safety tested and some ingredients could affect eyesight or harm the skin.

# Scam Awareness

Action Fraud received over 750 reports in four days relating to fake emails purporting to be from Ofgem. The emails state that the recipient is eligible for a rebate as a result of a newly announced government scheme. The links in the emails lead to genuine-looking websites that are designed to steal your personal and financial information.



- Remember, your bank, or any other official organisation, won't ask you to share personal information over email or text. If you need to check that it's a genuine message, contact the company using details from their official website or app.
- Spotted a suspicious email? Forward it to the Suspicious Email Reporting Service (SERS) - [report@phishing.gov.uk](mailto:report@phishing.gov.uk)

# Spot the signs of Holiday Fraud

In May 2022 Action Fraud launched a national awareness campaign to urge the public to think twice before handing over money and personal information when booking holidays.

As travel restrictions become more relaxed, Action Fraud, the national reporting centre for fraud and cyber-crime, is warning the public to remain vigilant against holiday fraud when booking flights or accommodation online.

In the financial year 2021/22, Action Fraud received 4,244 reports of holiday and travel related fraud – a substantial increase of over 120% when compared to the previous financial year.

Victims reported losing a total of £7,388,353 – an average loss of £1,868 per victim.

Whilst many accommodation providers who make use of online booking platforms are legitimate, some criminals will use these platforms to defraud victims by advertising counterfeit accommodation.

Over 7% of victims reported falling victim to suspects impersonating legitimate travel companies, including clone comparison websites, airline websites and holiday accommodation websites.

In some cases, victims have searched for flight tickets online and have found a website they believe to be the company's genuine website. In other cases, victims reported responding to an approach or advertisement on social media or using what they believed to be legitimate flight comparison websites to search for flights.

In both instances, victims reported being contacted by someone purporting to be from the airline, or flight comparison website, to take them through the booking procedure and take payment.

The fraudster may completely end contact after receiving payment or provide the victim with fake booking information.

Sadly, some victims have only become aware that they have been the victim of fraud when they arrive at the airport and are unable to check-in.

## **Tops tip to avoid falling victim to holiday fraud**

- **Stay safe online:** check the web address is legitimate and has not been altered by slight changes to a domain name – such as going from .co.uk to .org.
- **Do your research:** don't just rely on one review – do a thorough online search to ensure the company is credible. If a company is defrauding people, there is a good chance that consumers will post details of their experience, and warnings about the company.
- **Look for the logo:** check whether the company is an ABTA Member. Look for the ABTA logo on the company's website at [www.abta.com/abta-member-search](http://www.abta.com/abta-member-search)  
If you have any doubts, you can verify membership of ABTA online on their website. If you're booking a flight as part of a package holiday and want more information about ATOL protection, or would like to check whether a company is an ATOL holder, visit the CAA website at [www.caa.co.uk/ATOL-protection/Consumers/Checking-for-ATOL-protection/](http://www.caa.co.uk/ATOL-protection/Consumers/Checking-for-ATOL-protection/)
- **Pay safe:** wherever possible, pay by credit card. You should avoid paying directly into a private individual's bank account.
- **Check the paperwork:** you should study receipts, invoices and terms and conditions, and be very wary of any companies that don't provide any at all. When booking through a Holiday Club or Timeshare, get the contract thoroughly vetted by a solicitor before signing up.
- **Use your instincts:** if a deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

For a full list of tips to avoid becoming a victim of fraud, please visit <https://www.abta.com/tips-and-advice/planning-and-booking-a-holiday/how-avoid-travel-related-fraud>.

If you think you've been a victim of fraud, contact your bank immediately and report it to Action Fraud online at [actionfraud.police.uk](http://actionfraud.police.uk) or by calling 0300 123 2040, or call Police on 101.

## Flight Compensation



Flight delays and cancellations have been in the news for the past couple of years and have recently increased due to the return of people travelling post-covid and the airports and airlines seemingly being ill prepared.

There are rules and laws in place to protect consumers and Martin Lewis of Money Saving Expert has put together a comprehensive guide as to what you are entitled to if you experience delays or cancellations.

Please visit his website [www.moneysavingexpert.com](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com) or use this link below to read his recent article published on 3rd May 2022 following the highly publicised issues faced by consumers in recent weeks.

[www.moneysavingexpert.com/travel/flight-delays/?fbclid=IwAR1bvfAM3HGdMVlbIU8hGEN1S7d0nBLJ\\_T\\_kRvRIWenogXRYDtVG9U3VTsM](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/travel/flight-delays/?fbclid=IwAR1bvfAM3HGdMVlbIU8hGEN1S7d0nBLJ_T_kRvRIWenogXRYDtVG9U3VTsM)

## **Mobile Phone Scams Spoofing National Retailers**

Nationally there are increasing numbers of reports from persons being cold called by scammers offering cheap mobile phone deals or cheap mobile phone upgrades. The callers often claim to be calling from well-known national retailers of mobile phones, though they also use fake phone-related company names.

If you show any sort of interest when they call, they will then continue to call you persistently.

The scammers regularly change the telephone numbers that they call from and make calls through the internet to hide their true location. If you receive emailed quotes of special offers on mobile phones, do look closely at the sender's address for tell tale signs that it may be a scam.

A Croydon resident recently reported having received an email from a well known national mobile phone retailer, who emailed her to say that when she had placed her order for an upgrade to her mobile, they had sent her the wrong telephone by mistake. They gave her an address to return the phone to, which she did; however, that was the last that she heard from them. Now, they are not answering her telephone calls, they have her bank details and she has no mobile phone.

As always, Trading Standards stress that if something looks too good to be true, it usually is.



# Second Hand Car Sales



In recent years the second hand car market has seen a rise in prices and ownership and subsequently a rise in complaints about second hand cars being faulty or not road worthy. As a consumer you have certain rights if you are sold a faulty car or have been mis-sold.

Which? consumer magazine have an online tool and information to enable you to work out what your rights are and how to go about making a claim.

[www.which.co.uk/consumer-rights/cars/new-and-used-cars](http://www.which.co.uk/consumer-rights/cars/new-and-used-cars)

This article also has template letters to assist you writing to the dealer and advice on the various stages of complaining.

If you need to make a complaint about a trader or require advice please report to **Citizens Advice Consumer Line** on **0808 223 1133** or visit [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk) to report using their online form.

## Letting Agents and Estate Agents

Did you know? Residential Estate and Letting agents must register with one of 2 approved independent redress schemes, to resolve disputes between agents and consumers. To check and agent, you can use this checker which helps both consumers and enforcement bodies: Search the Property Agent Checker - National Trading Standards ([www.nationaltradingstandards.uk/property-agent-checker/](http://www.nationaltradingstandards.uk/property-agent-checker/))

The checker will help you to:

- **Check:** whether an agent is correctly registered
- **Find:** agents that are correctly registered, searching by town or postcode

This checker is not an endorsement or recommendation of the service offered by any agent. Searches are limited to 100 results, to prevent unauthorised use.

### **False membership claims or agent not listed?**

If you believe that an agent is wrongly claiming to be registered, or if you are searching for an agent that is not listed here please contact The National Trading Standards Estate & Letting Agency Team ([www.nationaltradingstandards.uk/contact/](http://www.nationaltradingstandards.uk/contact/))

### **Complaint about an agent?**

The team does not give individual advice to consumers or businesses, or mediate in individual complaints made against a business. Please contact the relevant scheme, using the links on the page for that agent. If you need advice, please contact: Citizens Advice ([www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk))

### **Up to date?**

The entry for each agent shows the date and time when it was last updated by the scheme provider (usually overnight), but this may sometimes be subject to delays for technical or other reasons. If in doubt, please confirm an agent's current membership directly with the provider, using the links on their business page within this site.

## Support Local Businesses – but check them out first

Given the difficulties that many small businesses experienced during the COVID lockdowns, residents have responded by looking to support their community by seeking out local trades persons when they need work to be carried out.

Whilst this obviously benefits local businesses, some unscrupulous traders have seen the opportunity to exploit the situation.

Sadly, we have received reports from a number of Croydon residents who have sourced traders through neighbourhood apps, Facebook groups, etc. They had advertised the work that they needed to be done and received responses from various 'local' traders in response.

Whilst the traders concerned had seemed very genuine and sent over reasonable quotes, etc, they had requested money to be paid upfront for parts and materials, carried out a small amount of work and then just not returned to finish the job and kept the money.

Some traders made repeated excuses about ill-health, others cited problems with vehicles breaking down, staff being unwell, etc. But the end results were the same, the residents were left out of pocket with half started projects and no way of tracing the trader as communication had been via apps, Facebook, messaging, etc. When they tried to contact the traders they either received no response or found themselves blocked.

So however you are sourcing traders to carry out work for you, it is important that you get full addresses and contact details for them, that you check any professional registrations or qualifications that they claim to have and that you look online for reviews of their work.

Just because they appear to be local does not mean that they are. Nor does it guarantee the quality of their work.

## Was this bulletin helpful?

**Contact Trading Standards to request a free door sticker advising cold callers that they are not welcome. If you are a victim of scam mail, contact us to receive a free copy of our toolkit on how to avoid falling victim and how to stop the letters.**

**Additionally, please let us know what you think of this bulletin and what Trading Standards topics you would like to see covered in future editions.**

**Contact Trading Standards:**

**Tel: 020 8407 1311**

**Email: [trading.standards@croydon.gov.uk](mailto:trading.standards@croydon.gov.uk)**

**Citizens Advice Consumer Service:**

**Tel: 03454 04 05 06**

**Web: [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)**