

Suffolk County Council *News Release*

Stay safe online, urges Suffolk Trading Standards

Three quarters of people feel unsafe when shopping online, according to a new survey into e-commerce conducted by the Trading Standards Institute.

More than half (63%) fear their card or bank details will get stolen, a tenth (10%) worry their item won't arrive and 6 per cent are concerned the item will turn out to be a fake.

As National e-Consumer Week gets underway from 20 to 24 September, the public are being warned to be more vigilant than ever about websites selling counterfeit goods, or sites which turn out to be fake and disappear with people's hard-earned cash.

To coincide with this week of action Suffolk Trading Standards will be running a web chat which will offer consumers the chance to ask a Trading Standards Officer a question or raise a concern about on-line shopping.

The web chat will take place between 12noon and 2pm on Wednesday 22 September via the Suffolk Trading Standards page found at www.facebook.com/SuffolkTradingStandards Those interested in taking part will need to register as a Facebook user.

For those unable to access the internet at home, Suffolk's libraries will be open for users to log on and staff will be able to assist.

Teenage entrepreneur Arjun Rajyagor, the winner of BBC TV's Junior Apprentice show, is backing National e-Consumer Week's Stay Safe Online campaign and has joined the calls urging people to shop safely, particularly those in his age group who are at serious risk from online scammers. To see his message, visit www.youtube.com/1TradingStandards.

18-year-old student Arjun, who runs a computer repair business in his spare time, said: "There's a whole new generation of us who are studying or have just started work. Because we've grown up with computers, we instinctively turn to the internet to look for bargains but rarely check out a company first. We all need to be far more careful in future."

Fakes which shoppers are particularly warned about include mobile phones, GHD hair straighteners, Nintendo DS Lite consoles, video games, clothing, toys, perfumes and cosmetics, alcoholic drinks and cigarettes. Many of the counterfeit versions contain dangerous components or may be harmful.

Andy Foster, Operations Director for the Trading Standards Institute, said the results of their survey of almost 800 people visiting their website (www.tsi.org.uk) during a four-week period showed that more than a quarter (28%) said they had problems shopping online with 48% saying the item never arrived, 19% said it was a fake and 7% were overcharged.

He said: "Our survey gives a snapshot of some of the problems that people are facing. However, we want to encourage people to carry on shopping online but make sure they follow our CHECK list first."

C Choose your shopping sites carefully

H Help yourself by thinking about the price, the place you are buying from and packaging

E Ensure the site is secure (look for https and the padlock)

C Contact law enforcement if you spot something suspicious

K Keep a copy of your order, details of the website and acknowledgements

Also ensure the website has a postal address for the trader and use a credit card for payments over £100, but never send your card or pin details via email. Further advice is also available from the Trading Standards Institute (www.tradingstandards.gov.uk/ncw), Electrical Safety Council

(www.escsafeshoppersguide.org.uk) and UK European Consumer Centre (www.ukecc.net).

Case studies

Case study 1: Perfume website - Lizi Piggins, who is 24 and from Leigh-on-Sea in Essex, bought after-shave for her boyfriend but it never arrived. She said: "It was a great looking perfume website but it was only when I did a Google search afterwards that I discovered loads of other people had been scammed. I just wish I'd checked first."

Case study 2: Online ticket sales - It is not just young people who fall foul of online scams, especially where websites look highly professional. Secondary school teacher Jane Ball, 35, from St Helen's on Merseyside, was left hugely disappointed after a £250 pair of tickets to a Michael Bublé concert failed to materialise. Jane explained: "It was meant to be a birthday treat from my husband but as the date got closer and they still hadn't arrived, we started to get suspicious. When we phoned the number on the email it just kept ringing and ringing and we then discovered the website had disappeared."

Case study 3: GHD hair straighteners - The Trading Standards Institute says the public need to beware of copycat items being sold by unscrupulous bargain websites, as Chris Allan, 46, from Fife in Scotland, discovered when buying GHD hair straighteners. Although the product was a perfect imitation, she became suspicious because the box was tatty and when she checked the product's hologram code number on the GHD website she discovered they were an imitation. She said: "It looked such a good deal but, as the saying goes, if it looks too good to be true, it probably is. I didn't dare risk using them in case they were unsafe so I took them to my local Trading Standards team in Forfar who confirmed they were counterfeit."

A spokesperson from GHD said : "Consumers should always visit www.ghdhair.com for our counterfeit Q&A and approved stockist locator before they buy ghd products. Ghd only sells to a network of approved stockists and these include professional hair salons, select premium retailers such as Harvey Nichols and Selfridges and certain online retailers. "We have a dedicated brand protection team which works closely with Trading Standards, customs and the police to prevent the importation and sale of potentially dangerous counterfeits and whilst we continuously monitor online trade for illegal activity and take appropriate action. "Due to poor quality construction, inferior components and lack of safety checks, fake ghd stylers are potentially dangerous and can cause electrocution, burns and hair damage. We urge all consumers to therefore do everything they can to avoid buying any counterfeit ghd – it is simply not worth the risk."