

# Consumer news

## We want you

### Giving to charity

How do you give to charity?

By monthly direct debit? To street collectors? Or are you planning to leave your assets in your will? Are you taking any steps to ensure your charity giving is as tax-efficient as possible? Details to David Pawsey.

### Buying to let

Have you recently bought a house or flat to rent out for profit? Have you built up a successful property portfolio or was buying to let harder than you thought? David Pawsey would like to hear how you got on.

### Financial advice

Have you used the services of a financial adviser? If so, did the advice help you improve your finances, or do you feel you would have been better off without it? Contact David Pawsey.

### Rate your bank

What is the best and worst thing about your bank? Perhaps you are fed up with call centres, high charges or branch closures, or maybe you always get good service and rarely experience problems. Send your details to David Pawsey.

### Controlling pests

Have you ever had a problem with unwanted pests, such as rats, mice, bed bugs, fleas, cockroaches, wasps and ants? Did you deal with it yourself or did you call in a professional? Andrew Neeson would like to hear from you.

Please include full contact details and a daytime phone number

■ [helpwanted@which.co.uk](mailto:helpwanted@which.co.uk) or write to Help Wanted, PO Box 44, Hertford X SG14 1SH

Faulty child locator service is challenged by concerned father

## You see her here, and there

### MOBILE-PHONE SERVICES

A mobile-phone service that helps parents keep tabs on the whereabouts of their kids left one father seeing double.

ChildLocate allows parents to track their kids via text message or the web, but when Gary Watkins from Exmouth signed up to a free trial, the service told him his daughter was in two separate places.

He said: 'One reading said she was within a mile of a point on one side of town, then the other said she was within a mile of another completely separate point across the other side of Exmouth.'

When he tried to cancel the service, he found it had charged £70 to his credit card.

Gary said he made dozens of phone calls to ChildLocate to get a refund,



The Watkins think twice about locator that lost its way

eventually receiving £30.

'It's a very poor service and I wouldn't recommend it to anyone,' he added.

ChildLocate said it did not receive a request to cancel in the trial period and that it refunded £39.95 as per its policy.

It added that the ability to locate a mobile phone depends on the coverage of the network provider. In urban areas, the accuracy can be down to 300 metres. In less built-up areas, the accuracy may be kilometres.

**It said she was in two separate places**

## Get scrapping

### CAR RECYCLING

Car-recycling centres have been set up across the UK to meet new EU rules that come into effect this month.

Under the End of Life Vehicle Regulations, car manufacturers are responsible for providing consumers with a free and convenient place to scrap their car.

Motorists shouldn't have to travel more than 30 miles to one of 1,340 authorised treatment facilities (ATFs). They will issue certificates of destruction, releasing owners from further tax obligations.

Eighty five per cent of a car must be reused through salvaged parts and recycled fluids, glass, plastic and rubber. The regulations aim to ensure car manufacturers design their vehicles



for recycling. Each manufacturer has approved one of two recycling companies – Autogreen and Car Take Back – but you don't have to take your brand of car to its named facility.

With the current high value of scrap metal, many ATFs will take cars free and in some cases could pay for the scrap.

**Most car materials should be recycled under new rules**

#### TAKE ACTION!

#### Take your car

■ To find your nearest facility visit [www.environmentagency.gov.uk](http://www.environmentagency.gov.uk)

**103 inches**

width of UK's biggest TV on sale, costing £50,000

JOHN LEWIS

**500g**

amount of Parmesan eaten weekly by Italian families

ITALIAN FARMERS' UNION

**10%**

of British women own more than 30 pairs of shoes

MINTEL



## Anger as rail fares rocket

### RAIL TRAVEL

Millions of rail passengers face even more misery this month as the latest inflation-busting price rises come into force.

The cost of some tickets has risen by more than 12 per cent and rail passenger groups have slammed the price hikes.

For example, the cost of a standard open return from London to Cardiff has increased from £128 to £144, while passengers travelling from London to Plymouth have to pay £214 for a standard open return – an increase of £24.

The cost of regulated fares, such as season tickets and saver fares, has gone up by an average of 4.3 per cent across the country.

Unregulated fares, which include cheap-day returns, long-distance open and some advance-purchase fares, increased by an average of 4.7 per cent.

Anthony Smith, Chief Executive of rail watchdog Passenger Focus, said: 'Inflation-busting price hikes on top of already high fares will make for an unhappy passenger new year.'

'If you now want to travel a longer distance in peak times and don't know exactly when you are coming back you will pay very, very dearly.'

#### TAKE ACTION!

##### Get cheaper fares

Passenger Focus has a guide on cheap tickets, on 0845 302 2022 or at [www.passengerfocus.org.uk](http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk)



Some journeys have risen 12 per cent

Salesman challenged for signing up couple with Alzheimer's

## Npower sales concern

### ENERGY SERVICES

Npower is investigating its salesman who breached industry rules by signing up a couple with Alzheimer's.

The salesman cold called at their Manchester home and tried to convince the pensioners to switch from Scottish Power.

He was still there when their daughter Anne Riley rang. Despite being asked to leave, the salesman ignored her and persuaded the couple to switch.

Neither was aware they'd signed up and Anne has demanded an explanation. She said: 'I told him he was not to get them to sign anything. I said my parents were vulnerable and that he should leave any documentation and I could look over it at the weekend. I asked him to leave but when I rang back 15 minutes later he was there.'

When Anne's brother visited the couple the next day he found a signed Npower contract, which has now been cancelled.

Anne said: 'I was very, very angry about what happened. My mum said there'd been two men in the house. One was actually being trained. They could have been switched without anyone knowing.'

Industry guidelines say sales agents

**'I told him he was not to get them to sign anything'**

must not exploit a person's vulnerability and must leave premises when requested. Npower promises never to pursue business with vulnerable people.

Npower said: 'We are carrying out a full investigation. Our sales advisers are trained to deal sensitively and professionally with all customers and they are taught to look out for any signs of vulnerability.'



Anne Riley is angry that her vulnerable parents were targets

## Phone man is barred from business

### PREMIUM LINES

A man behind six phone scams that tricked people into calling costly phone lines has been banned from business.

Phone watchdog Icstis said Nick Elmer, of Milton Keynes, was responsible for the conduct of several firms including PRS Communications. It sent text messages promising a £1,000 prize, but people calling the £1.50 claim line received leisure vouchers that were almost impossible to redeem. PRS was fined £230,000, which was reduced to £100,000 on appeal.

#### TAKE ACTION!

##### Scam beater

If you've been tricked by a phone company, contact Icstis at [www.icstis.org.uk](http://www.icstis.org.uk)

He's been barred from involvement with premium-rate services for 18 months after Icstis investigated his connection with several scams. Elmer was linked to Better Phone Deals, Great Holiday Offers, Pre-selected Promotions, Premier Hotline Promotions and Power Promotions, which were rapped by Icstis and ordered to pay fines totalling £155,000.

Icstis said: 'This is a person who could have done considerable harm. Barring is the ultimate sanction Icstis can take, sending out a strong message to the industry.'