

**Here to help**



**Car-crash charges returned**

*Which?* reader Adam Follett found himself on

a collision course with car-rental firm Avis after it took more than £1,200 from his bank account for damage he thought he was insured against.

Adam had hired a 4x4 for the 'rougher roads' of Cyprus. Avis representatives assured him that there would be no problems, advising him on the best tracks down to beaches and even saying 'you could wreck this car and you would be covered'.

Unfortunately, on the first day of hire the car hit a tree. While nobody was hurt, Adam was shocked when Avis told him that he wasn't insured, as he had driven on a non-asphalt road.

The company then took £1,276 out of Adam's account without warning or detailing how it reached that figure.

When we raised the matter with its UK office, Avis told us it never comments on individual queries.

But it wrote to Adam, saying Cyprus customers are no longer insured to drive on non-surfaced roads after it had proved too costly. Avis admitted, however, that this was not 'explained clearly' and refunded the £1,276.43, waived the original rental charges and gave an additional £100 to cover any interest charges and the inconvenience caused.

■ If you hire a car abroad, take time-labelled pictures of the car at the start and finish of the hire and get a receipt on return to avoid disputes over damage. Also, try to hire your car while in this country so you're covered by UK law, and book on a credit card.

B&Q challenged over its handling of a returned faulty product

# Broken part vanishes

**HOME MAINTENANCE**

**B**&Q has been accused of 'pulling a fast one' after a broken bathroom fitting that caused thousands of pounds' worth of damage was swapped for a new one during investigations by the DIY giant.

David Grahame had asked the store to investigate after finding the elbow fitting he'd used in his new bath was to blame for a leak that caused his bathroom wall to collapse. He maintains that the leak didn't appear until weeks after fitting as he'd left the bath panel off for some time to check for any drips. He had spent more than £2,400 repairing the damage.

Canny David marked and photographed the original elbow fitting before submitting it to B&Q for inspection.

His pictures show where he drew dots on the broken washer and outer casement before putting it back together and giving it to his local store last December.

But in January the part was returned with an unmarked washer inside and a report saying that there was no fault.

The store refused to discuss the matter further – until we got in touch. David said:



**A faulty elbow fitting that David bought caused £2,400 damage (left) to his newly fitted bathroom**

'It seems like they tried to pull a fast one. When I took it up with B&Q with letters and calls, I was told that the case was closed.'

B&Q has now paid David £2,400 for the damage but could not say what happened with the part.

A spokeswoman said: 'A considerable time has passed, which we apologise for, and we are unable to decipher exactly what happened due to contradictory accounts we've received. Therefore, we've decided to pay Mr Grahame's claim in full to apologise for the inconvenience and to restore his faith in B&Q.'



**TAKE ACTION!**

■ **Peter McCarthy of Which? Legal Service says:** 'If you return a faulty part, it's best to mark it, take photos and time and date them, and get someone to witness your actions. Then, any dispute over whether it was you who marked it, and whether it's the actual part you rejected, can be proved.'

# High praise for our work

**WHICH?**



**Sharon Hodgson MP and editor Neil Fowler discuss our success**

**M**Ps from all parties have united to congratulate Which? on our 50th anniversary and recognise the improvements that we've brought to consumers' lives.

More than 120 MPs have signed an early day motion (EDM), which recognised our achievements. It highlighted our growth, starting from a London garage to being the world's second largest consumer organisation.

Sharon Hodgson MP, who tabled the EDM, said: 'Which? continues to mount credible campaigns on key consumer rights issues as well as

provide legal advice and invaluable product testing... Consumers need a strong advocate that can help boost their bargaining power in the high street and market place, and enable them, when necessary, to fight large, anonymous and often uncaring or inefficient organisations.'

Consumer Minister Gareth Thomas added: 'My department will continue to work closely with Which? to ensure consumers get a fair deal, value for money, safe and high-quality products and greater choice; that is good for both consumers and British business.'



Prescription drug advert shows that self regulation isn't working

# Botox on ebay

## COSMETIC PROCEDURES

**W**hich? has uncovered an ex-nurse illegally advertising Botox parties on eBay, raising fears that cowboy cosmetic practices are thriving.

Our investigation confirms suspicions that unqualified people can get hold of and inject the prescription-only drug.

We phoned the ex-nurse, posing as a potential customer looking to set up a Botox party.

As a prescription-only medicine, Botox can be prescribed only by a health professional with prescribing rights – and that must be for a specific patient – although a nurse or therapist can administer the drug under the direction of the prescriber.

The woman, named Lisa, told us that she was an ex-nurse who had trained in London's Harley Street. When asked whether a doctor would accompany her, she said: 'No, he prescribes me Botox and I bring it in my freezer bag.'

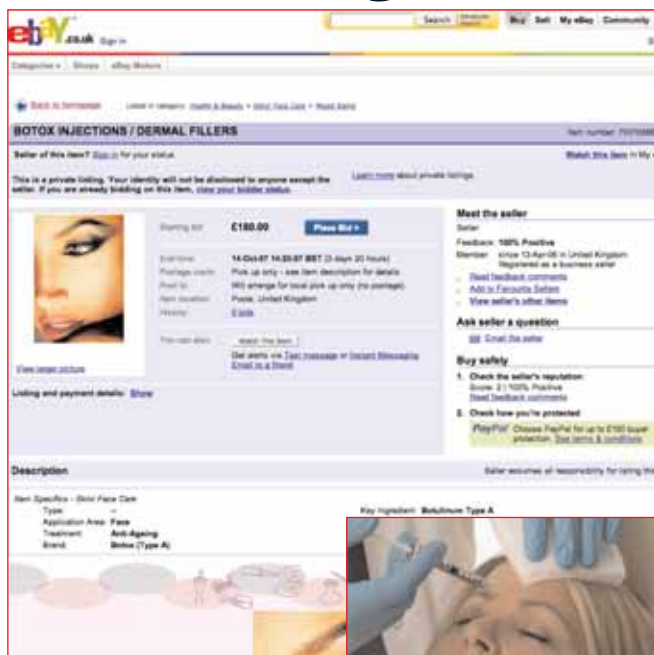
Lisa claimed: 'It's better to have Botox by an ex-nurse who's a beautician than by some doctor who normally deals with bunions.'

She did tell us that drinking alcohol before treatment increases the chances of bruising but said one glass would be fine and then admitted that she had injected drunken party-goers.

We were told that the side effects for Botox were 'none whatsoever... except for drooping', but bleeding, bruising and infections, as with any injections, are risks.

## Expert view

We showed the transcript of our conversation to cosmetic dermatologist Dr Tamara Griffiths. She said: 'I was shocked by this. Botox parties are inappropriate situations in which to administer



**Botox treatments (right) have been advertised illegally on the website eBay (above)**

this drug. That she's injected intoxicated people raises questions about whether they gave informed consent.'

We alerted the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). It said: 'The MHRA thanks Which? for passing on information relating to the illegal advertising of Botox. We will look into this as a matter of urgency.'

'Promotion of Botox to the public is strictly prohibited. If it's used for cosmetic purposes, the prescribing doctor accepts responsibility for safety, quality and efficacy.'

### TAKE ACTION!

■ Some information glamorises cosmetic procedures while underplaying the risks. Go to [www.which.co.uk/cosmetic](http://www.which.co.uk/cosmetic) for the full facts.

## Cowboy concern

The government this year backed away from introducing legislation to clamp down on cosmetic treatments such as fillers and Botox, opting for self regulation instead. This prompted fears that cowboy practices will increase.

And as this issue went to press, the government was set to consult on plans to deregulate the use of cosmetic lasers in favour of letting the industry police itself.

Which? health campaigner Jenny Driscoll said: 'There's an increasingly casual approach to non-surgical treatments, like Botox parties.'

'Tougher, not weaker, regulation is needed. And we question whether the industry, left to itself, will really be able or willing to provide the sort of protection that consumers really need.'

## Still no action over theft of charity bags

### CHARITY FUNDRAISING

**C**harity bag collector Clothes Aid has criticised police for the lack of action over the continuing theft of bags from doorsteps.

In August (p8), we reported on the increasing number of bogus collectors and concern that police and other authorities were not doing enough to tackle the problem.

In an effort to help track down gangs stealing bags, Which? put an electronic tracking device (below) inside a bag of clothes that pinpointed a depot in Barking where stolen bags were known to have been handled.

Our researcher went to the depot with a Clothes Aid representative, who identified clothes bags it uses in collections for London's Great Ormond Street Hospital among others. Clothes Aid estimates that it loses 50 tonnes of clothing donations a week to this crime.

But when Clothes Aid wrote to Barking and Dagenham police, alerting it to the activity, the charity collector was told that such crime was not deemed a police priority so resources were not available to tackle it.

Michael Lomotey of Clothes Aid said: 'This is very frustrating. We know who the thieves are and we know where they're storing the stolen bags, but nothing is being done about it.'

When we contacted Barking and Dagenham police, it confirmed that it wasn't prioritising this crime but said it would offer charities advice on preventing doorstep theft.



### TAKE ACTION!

■ Visit [www.which.co.uk/charitybags](http://www.which.co.uk/charitybags) for tips that will help ensure your old clothes reach your chosen charities.