

## News in brief

### BEWARE SUMMER SELLERS

■ Watch out for cold-calling con men during the summer months. Trading standards officers have warned householders that summer is the 'hotspot' period for complaints about door-to-door crooks. More than 8,600 complaints were received throughout last year.

### ASK WHICH? FOR HELP

■ After we told you in May (p7) about the case of Michael Brown's valuables lost from a NatWest safety deposit box, the bank moved quickly to recover them. Jewellery thought



to be worth £25,000 was handed to a female customer with his initials, but following our report Michael has the

valuables back and has been offered £2,500 compensation. If you have a problem you'd like us to investigate, contact us at [news@which.co.uk](mailto:news@which.co.uk)

### HANDLE HIPS

■ If you're putting a home with at least four bedrooms up for sale this month you'll need to commission a home information pack (Hip). From 31 December, Hips must be completed before a house goes on sale. See [www.homeinformationpacks.gov.uk](http://www.homeinformationpacks.gov.uk) for more details.

### SAVE ON UTILITY BILLS

■ Energy regulator Ofgem has announced it's a great time to switch suppliers, and that the trend to move



is encouraging competitive tariffs from

providers. You can research tariffs through our online service; go to [switch.which.co.uk](http://switch.which.co.uk) and save on average £245 a year.

Figures show superbug compensation is hard to secure

## Modest money for MRSA

### HEALTHCARE

Victims of MRSA are failing to win compensation because it's hard to pin the blame on hospitals, Which? has learnt.

The superbug is linked to more than 1,500 deaths a year and has left others severely ill or disabled, but figures obtained under the Freedom of Information Act show that less than a third of claims are successful.

Lawyers say this is because it's hard to prove where and when an infection starts.

Since 2000, the NHS Litigation Authority (NHSLA) has ruled on 431 MRSA claims in England, but only 135 have resulted in compensation.

In Wales, 89-year-old Kitty Cope won out-of-court damages after an infection in 2001, at the Princess of Wales Hospital, Bridgend, left her disabled. Tests proved that MRSA was contracted there and documents showed staff didn't follow policies on infection control.



Kitty is one of few patients to get MRSA compensation

Kitty's case raised hopes that more cases could be won if victims could show that hospitals didn't follow their policies. But the NHSLA figures show that only two of 92 cases stating this have won damages.

Clinical negligence lawyer Sarah Rowland, of Irwin Mitchell solicitors, said: 'Although MRSA is a massive problem in hospitals, it's difficult to bring a claim because it's hard to say exactly when and where a person got MRSA. If you can show a hospital hasn't complied with infection-control policies, you've got evidence to go on but that isn't enough to say this person contracted MRSA in hospital and should get damages.'

### TAKE ACTION!

■ The NHS complaints procedure should be tried before legal action. Go to [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) for information. Also try the MRSA support group at [www.mrsasupport.co.uk](http://www.mrsasupport.co.uk) or 0121 459 0490.

## A consumer calls...

## BORDERS

Research for Borders found that reading racy novels burns calories. We called to ask which were best

**Which?** I've heard you can lose weight by reading novels.

**Borders, Oxford Street, London** Reading probably doesn't do it but following instructions could help – we've got books on weight loss.

**Which?** No, there was a thing in the paper saying reading certain novels

helps fight flab.

**Borders** By exercising your brain, your hand turning the page or by carrying a heavy book?

**Which?** Jilly Cooper was mentioned

**Borders** I'll ask...Yeah, there's a Paul McKenna book you read and don't do a lot, listen to a tape or something, but my

colleague said it didn't work for her. There's one called *I Can Make You Thin* – we have it in stock. **Which?** Hasn't Borders done research showing that some novels get your heart rate going?

**Borders** Sounds like an April fool. If they said Jilly Cooper, perhaps romance is the idea, as you read it

and get excited. I'll ask my superiors and see if we can get a display done. **Which?** I really wanted to know if it would be OK just to listen to a book on tape or would you need to exercise as well by turning the pages?

**Borders** I'm intrigued. Thanks for bringing it to my attention.

# 22,939

UK passports lost overseas  
in one year

FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

# 6,078

UK passports lost in Spain in one  
year – the worst country

FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

We're to pay 70 per cent more for passports than two years ago

# Pricey passports

## TRAVEL

The latest price rise for UK passports means that we're set to pay even higher fees than many of our European counterparts.

We're well ahead of EU states such as Germany and France already, at £66, while Spain charges £10.77 for a passport. In October a UK adult passport will cost £72 – 70 per cent up on the 2005 cost of £42.

The last rise was attributed to increased security measures, such as incorporating microchips with personal and physical data, known as biometric details.

The latest rise has been put down to increasing costs of consular services around the world as more UK citizens travel. The number of overseas trips has trebled since the mid 1980s to around 65 million a year.

Foreign Office figures reveal that the annual caseload for consular help has risen to 75,000 from 9,000 ten years ago. The consular premium levied on each passport has increased this year to £15.12 from £9.65, after staying roughly the same since 2002.

However, German and US travellers take comparable numbers of overseas trips, 74.5m and 63.5m respectively, yet are

charged considerably less for their passports than UK citizens.

A Home Office spokeswoman said that, unlike many other countries, the cost of a UK passport is not subsidised by the taxpayer. 'Passport production and issuing has to be paid for through the passport fee – under Treasury rules it cannot be set to make a loss or profit,' she added.

But Mike Pedley, of *Holiday Which?*, said: 'It's hard to see why UK passports cost so much more than their European counterparts. Hopefully, this will be the last of these large price increases for a while.'

Germany has comparable numbers of overseas travellers yet charges considerably less for passports

### TAKE ACTION!

■ If your passport is due for renewal this autumn, or you're buying for the first time, get it before 4 October to avoid the rise to £72. New applicants may be subject to a 30-minute interview.

■ Those renewing passports can do so up to nine months in advance and have the remaining time added to their new passport.

■ If you need to renew a passport in a hurry, you'll pay more – the fast-track service is currently £91 for an adult and £80 for a child and the same-day service is £108 and £93. Applicants born on or before 2 September 1929 are eligible for a free passport.

■ Visit [www.passport.gov.uk](http://www.passport.gov.uk) for more information.

## HOW TEN-YEAR ADULT PASSPORT PRICES COMPARE CURRENTLY

We checked out a range of passport prices across the world



## Which? view



A model of not-for-profit business development and success

Chief Executive Peter Vicary-Smith outlines the benefits of Which?'s structure as we near our 50th anniversary

Which? aims to make individuals as powerful as the organisations they deal with each day. We pursue this goal with vigour; ask the banks, stores and car manufacturers who know how strong a customer is with the right support, which we offer.

To do this we try to practise what we preach in all activities. Thus we produce thoroughly researched products supported by good customer service at excellent value for money. Our prices have not increased for four years now, despite our magazines' sizes increasing substantially. We feel that this results in massive trust from customers, so we can plan positively for the future.

Ultimately Which? is a charity, charged with campaigning for all consumers, and accountable to its Ordinary Members (OMs) – a role any subscriber is eligible to take up. The OMs elect two thirds of the Council – our governing body – which co-opts one third of its membership, thus ensuring that all consumer expertise is represented.

Our charity, or not-for-profit, status should not be mistaken for inefficiency. The success of the magazines and online services is paramount – they're our only source of revenue and without them our campaigning would be very limited. With this in mind our products are managed by the Board of our trading company, Which? Ltd, whose members are appointed by Council to bring non-executive judgment and guidance to the organisation.

We believe it's a model that has served all consumers – Which? members and others – well as it has evolved over the past half century, and that it will continue to do so.