

Here to help



Bill from stolen mobile phone is recovered

Regular readers of these pages may remember the Vodafone customer saddled with a £15,300 debt after thieves stole her phone and ran up a huge bill calling sex lines.

Fortunately, Which? intervened on her behalf and the bill was waived, while Vodafone promised to tighten up its procedures to deal with such problems. But, two years on, we've received another tale of woe about a stolen mobile that also involves Vodafone.

Daniel arrived at his London home last July to find that it had been broken into four days earlier. The burglars had taken his phone and spent more than £700 on calls. Daniel, who's on incapacity benefit because he has major seizures, was told to pay, even though he hadn't made the calls.

When he said he couldn't, he was informed his account would be closed – adding a further £400 to his debt due to an unfinished contract, all of which was to be recovered by debt collectors. Worse still, Daniel was left without a mobile should he injure himself during a seizure.

We asked Vodafone why it hadn't spotted the call patterns. It said it could monitor only a percentage of customers for phone usage, but was planning to extend this. But it didn't provide figures.

It added that its terms and conditions state that customers are required to pay for all usage up to the time they tell Vodafone the handset has been lost or stolen.

Vodafone has now waived the £700 and has given Daniel a new phone.

Deborah had to buy her air tickets to Cambodia twice

Take note over card numbers

CREDIT CARDS

Which? has discovered that you could end up paying twice if you book tickets on a card that's then lost, stolen or simply replaced.

One of our lawyers was refused airline tickets she'd booked before an automatic upgrade to her credit card.

Deborah Prince bought the flights to Cambodia in April, before Tesco Personal Finance upgraded her card.

But in October, with an hour before takeoff at Singapore airport – and her husband and son waiting in departures – she was told by Silkair that she would have to buy a new seat.

Deborah said: 'The airline insisted I show the card I booked the flights with for security reasons. I assumed my new card would be equivalent.'

And Deborah's troubles didn't stop there; when she returned to the UK, Tesco initially implied it was her fault for destroying the old card – even though it tells customers to do this in its terms and conditions.

But Tesco has now agreed a refund and sent £100 compensation. It said: 'These were unfortunate circumstances brought about by a specific retailer's [Silkair] policy and, as far as we are aware, a one-off.'

Sandra Quinn, of the banking organisation Apacs, said: 'We'd expect a retailer to ask for another piece of identification. This is common as if your card is lost or subject to fraud you'll get a card with a new number.'

She added: 'Most banks will advise customers to cancel any recurring transaction like a subscription because they will continue to go through.'



Deborah and her troublesome credit card

TAKE ACTION!

■ If your new card isn't accepted, and you booked tickets costing more than £100, you may be able to claim against your credit card company under the Consumer Credit Act.

British Gas tops your recent concerns

LEGAL SERVICES

Which? lawyers dealt with more gripes about British Gas than any other company during the last quarter of 2007.

We logged 49 complaints about the energy provider – ranging from billing disputes to problems with its Homecare Maintenance Plan.

Second prize went to BT, which was the subject of 31 calls recorded, while complaints from 14 angry Anglian Home Improvements customers propelled the company into our top ten of

companies you most complained about (see opposite).

Which? Legal Service has also been dealing with a growing number of holiday complaints, particularly concerning problems with building work around hotels, filthy accommodation and cancelled flights.

Which? lawyer Peter McCarthy

said: 'If your holiday is cancelled or altered significantly by a travel company, or standards are poor when you arrive, you have legal rights that we can advise on.'

See p83 for more on British Gas.

TAKE ACTION!

■ A year's membership of Which? Legal Service costs just £39 if you're already a Which? member. Join at www.which.co.uk/legalservice or call 01992 822828.





Tony, Lorena and Peter were among 14 people to complain to us about Anglian last autumn

Anglian answers back to member concerns about its service

Complaints flood in

HOME MAINTENANCE

Anglian Home Improvements has the dubious honour of making it into our top ten of companies you most complained about.

Grievances range from shoddy work to delays with installation, and we've even heard how it installed a window with broken glass.

Policeman Tony Munday says he had '11 months of horror' and dubbed Anglian the 'worst outfit I've had the misfortune to deal with'.

He ordered a conservatory in September 2006 to complete the dream home he was renovating. It took Anglian seven months to answer questions about the build, delaying his architect and builders.

Tony said: 'The failure to respond to communication by me, my architect and my builder was shocking.'

His concerns were only taken seriously when he emailed Anglian Chief Executive Alex McNutt. The company has offered Tony money off his bill, but he's still disputing it.

Lorena Martin spent thousands on double glazing, but gaps left around her windows meant her home became colder.

She told us: 'Anglian's lack of interest in resolving this matter is absurd. Someone came to check the work, but six weeks later we've heard nothing.'

Anglian admitted that remedial work was required on Lorena's windows, which is scheduled to start.

Peter Norman paid for a 'premium' window-fitting service, but there were gaps and one pane was smashed. It took months to put the work right, but Anglian waived £300 of his bill.

ANGLIAN RESPONDS

We asked Anglian Home Improvements to answer some of the complaints we've heard

Q Why is Anglian among our top ten companies most complained about?

A Anglian is the market leader – twice the size of our nearest rival. We receive many compliments from customers delighted with our services and we're disappointed that we've not demonstrated this to those customers you've told us about.

Q How will you address concerns about customer service?

A Customer service is very important to us. Now, if a customer

query is not resolved within a 48-hour period, it escalates to a senior level and ultimately to the Chief Executive.



Q How do you ensure work meets high standards?

A Fitting teams receive specific training for the installation of our unique products. We have a published policy for standards in all areas of the business (see www.anglianhome.co.uk/about_standards_industry.htm).

Q What should customers do if they're unhappy?

A They should call our national coordination office on 0845 099 0999.



Campaigns round-up

LABELLING CONCERN

Shoppers will be short-changed by European Commission plans on food labelling. The Commission wants levels of salt, fat and sugar to be shown as percentages of guideline daily amounts, rather than traffic-light colours, despite research by Which? and the Food Standards Agency showing that consumers find traffic lights easier to use. UK foodmakers are split over the schemes, and the Prime Minister and Health Secretary recently called for them to unite and end the confusion. We'll be pushing for Europe to adopt traffic lights.



Traffic light labels (right) are easier to use

HAPPY SHOPPERS

In our latest trawl of supermarkets, we found many positive examples of healthy food being marketed to kids. Go to www.which.co.uk/kidsfood to see our latest 'Good Apples'. Let us know about positive promotions you've found, and you could win one of our stylish kids' food campaign bags for all your shopping needs.



CALL OUR CAMPAIGNERS

We'll be taking calls on 13 March to seek your views on our food and health campaigns. Team members want to hear about your healthcare experiences, including being in hospital and having cosmetic treatments, as well as any examples you have of irresponsible food marketing to children. Call 01992 822800 between 10am and 2pm. (We're unable to give individuals legal or medical advice.)