

Postage costs to be set by size and thickness from this month



Every household will receive a leaflet explaining the new charges

New pricing for letters

POSTAL SERVICES

A massive shake-up in postal pricing starts this month. From 21 August the cost of posting a letter will depend on size and thickness as well as weight.

As part of Royal Mail's £10 million information drive, every UK household will get a paper template in the next two weeks so you can size up letters before posting. If you underpay, your recipient will be charged a £1 admin fee and the shortfall.

Under the changes, mail will be charged based on three size formats – letter, large letter or packet. Sending a standard-sized letter weighing up to 100g will still cost 32p but an A4 envelope weighing up to 100g and up to the thickness of a cigarette packet will be classed as a large letter and cost 44p.

Royal Mail says that compact, heavy items such as books will be cheaper to send, while light but bulky items, such as a poster tube, will cost more.

The Greeting Card Association criticised the changes, fearing consumers will have to pay more to send novelty cards, but its members have devised ways to lessen the impact: 'A lot of our members have resized cards and have made new badges so cards will still be classed as a letter.'

Film processor Bonusprint was up in arms at the new pricing system. Its Managing Director Anthony Ward said: 'The changes are costing us hundreds of thousands of pounds but we're not looking at passing increases on to consumers.' Bonusprint customers don't pay to send films in the company's Freepost envelopes, so Bonusprint will pick up the extra postage costs.

TAKE ACTION!

Request a pricing leaflet

If you don't receive your pricing leaflet, pick one up at your local post office or order one at www.royalmail.com

Tesco food labels too confusing

FOOD



Each pack contains				
Calories	Sugar	Fat	Saturates	Salt
835	7.5g	44.8g	28.8g	2.6g
42%	8%	64%	144%	44%
of your guideline daily amount				

Tesco has its own nutrition labelling

Tesco's nutrition labelling scheme has come under fire after Which? research found it has left shoppers confused.

The supermarket has rejected the Food Standards Agency's (FSA) traffic light labelling system showing levels of fat, sugar and salt (see p71). Instead it's opted for its own labels, which shoppers find more difficult to interpret, our research has found.

In the Which? research of 636 people, significantly more were able to correctly identify and compare nutrients using the FSA traffic light system. The Tesco guideline daily amount scheme came out as the weakest.

Sue Davies, who worked on the Which? campaign, said: 'It is confusing for consumers if our supermarket shelves are full of different, contrasting food labels.'

Asda, Co-op, Sainsbury's and Waitrose are backing the FSA traffic light scheme, but so far Unilever, Danone, Nestlé, Kellogg's, PepsiCo and Kraft have opted for their own labels which, like Tesco, show percentage guideline daily amounts.

Sue Davies added: 'We are calling on all retailers and manufacturers to use the FSA scheme so that customers are easily able to identify which products are the most healthy.'

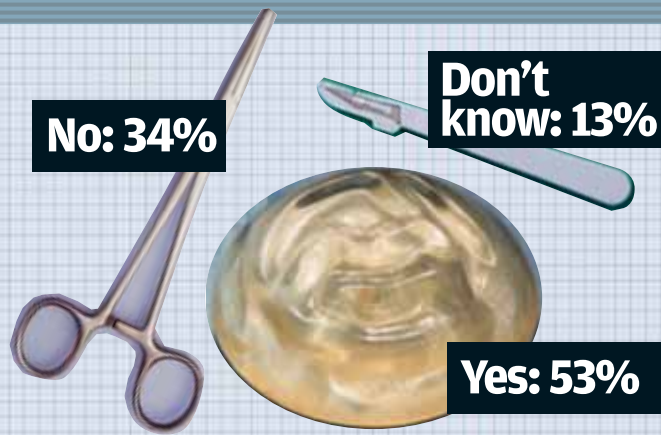
Tesco said: 'While we understand that traffic lights may give a simpler initial impression, customers have told us that our system is more useful in taking practical steps towards a healthier diet.'

For more on our food campaigns, see p71.

Public vote Cosmetic surgery

690,000 cosmetic surgery procedures will be carried out in Britain this year, up 40 per cent on 2005, according to a report by Mintel. We asked: If cosmetic surgery were free, would you have something done?

Survey of 1,008 adults carried out online for Which? by Explorandum between 10 and 12 July. Findings don't necessarily represent our views



Our research highlights the poor experience of consumers

NHS Direct fails our out of hours test

HEALTH

NHs Direct is failing in its duty to help people who fall ill after their GP surgery is closed. The 24-hour telephone helpline, set up eight years ago, should help patients get the right treatment out of hours, but it's ineffective, with some people struggling to get through.

One patient told us: 'One Saturday I phoned NHS Direct and held on for about 15 minutes. In the end I got in the car and drove to A&E.'

The findings come after we asked consumers to tell us their experiences of the service for the Which? study into out-of-hours healthcare. One consumer said it's no better than calling a relative. She said: 'NHS Direct used to be so good but now I don't find it any more use than calling my mother-in-law. Staff just tell you what you already know.'

And NHS Direct, which is set to close 12 call centres, isn't well publicised. More than 70 per cent of the 1,367 people questioned said they didn't know the helpline contact number, and 7 per cent said they haven't even heard of the service.

Consumers also complain of delays and having to repeat information. Daniel Meyer from Twickenham waited over an hour and relayed his son's symptoms to three people before being told that his six-year-old needed to see a doctor. His son had fallen ill with a temperature one Saturday morning.

Daniel said: 'We rang the doctor's surgery. The recorded message directed us to NHS Direct. We rang and had comprehensive details taken by an operator who said she'd arrange for a nurse to ring back. The nurse rang and took the details again. She said we needed to speak to a doctor who'd ring us in 20 to 40 minutes.'

The doctor rang and took the details for a third time. He thought the boy should be seen by a doctor as he might need

'I don't find it any more use than calling my mother-in-law'

antibiotics. He directed the Meyers to a local hospital with a Saturday walk-in surgery.

Daniel asked his GP surgery why it doesn't give out details of the drop-in surgery and found it was because the hospital isn't under control of the same primary care trust (PCT). He said: 'I really want to know where to go to get the service I need without concerning myself about which PCT it belongs to.'

The Which? report, *Which way?: negotiating the out-of-hours maze*, calls for better information on where to seek treatment if you fall ill outside surgery hours. We want to see NHS Direct properly resourced so it's a real help to people out of hours, and its number changed to a three-digit number that's easier to recall.



Daniel Meyer waited over an hour and relayed his son's symptoms to three people before going to a local hospital

TAKE ACTION!

Where to find out more information

For the full Which? report visit www.which.co.uk and click on 'Health and well-being'. NHS Direct can be contacted on 0845 4647 or via www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk. For more on how to access treatment out of hours see 'Solving the 24-hour healthcare puzzle', May 2006, p12.

Which? tackles one reader's problem printer

Liz Edwards takes on Dell for its customer service



Sometimes the phone just won't do for fixing a problem. But what does it take to make a company visit, when

it seems it only wants to talk to customers from a safe distance?

James Muir has been driven round the bend by Dell's Indian call centre. He found the staff charming, but all this while, they failed to sort out his new printer.

What James really wanted was an engineer – in person. But all Dell would do was to keep taking his calls and sending more printers. By the time he emailed us, James had three. But each new 964 all-in-one printer and fax had the same problem: it couldn't receive faxes.

James, from Berkshire, is self-employed and sells building insulation. He said: 'The fax is crucial because I receive architects' sketches and drawings. Every time I phoned Dell at Bracknell, it would put me on to the call centre in Bangalore or Hyderabad, and it would send me another printer.'

We asked Dell to sort out James's printer – by now number seven – and the company finally sent an engineer. After an hour and a half, he hit upon a solution of rerouting the line so it avoided James's ADSL internet box, and took away the printer for tests.

Dell admitted that other customers had had similar problems and it was solving these 'case by case'.

It said it would consider extra training for its customer care advisers about this issue, and asked anyone with this problem to call 0870 9080800 and speak to its technical advisers...who, charmingly, told me they could send customers another printer.