



Ask the experts

Hosepipe bans

I've been told that, as I have a water meter, I can't be prosecuted for using a hosepipe because, under civil liberties laws, once the water has gone through the meter, it's my property to do with as I wish. Is this correct?

TREVOR SMITH, DOVER

Once the water passes through your stopcock, it is your property. But it is a criminal offence to use water in particular ways. Bans affect private householders and make it illegal to use a hosepipe to water a garden or wash a car, though you can use a watering can for both these and you

can use a hose to fill a swimming pool. The bans are unlikely to infringe human rights laws when balanced against the need for drinking and sanitation for everyone throughout the summer. Look out for our report next month on how to save water.

Boiler energy savings

Up to 40 per cent savings on gas by changing a 15-year-old boiler for a new condensing one...this is the thrust of literature from British Gas. I know that condensing boilers have not been in use for very long, but is there tangible evidence that they are as efficient as British Gas claims?

CLIFF WATKINS, BECKENHAM

Condensing boilers are definitely more efficient than non-condensing boilers and replacing a 15-year-old boiler is likely to save you energy. It is possible that savings could be as much as 40 per cent if you took one of the poorest-performing non-condensing boilers and compared it with the latest available, but we think the average saving is likely to be closer to 20 per cent. It's difficult to measure exact savings as it depends on the efficiency of your old boiler and your new one. We've a report on boilers planned for later this year.

Recycling debate

We're encouraged to shred things for security but our local council no longer accepts shredded paper, and I dislike adding to landfill. A survey of 96 English councils found that 29 per cent didn't accept shredded paper for recycling and more than 13 per cent of those that did required it to be separated from other paper. Our council is now encouraging us to recycle and compost as

Which? focus on Eggs

Bird flu worries

The World Health Organization (WHO) says that, to avoid the risk of bird flu, I should cook eggs until both the whites and yolks are solid. But according to the UK Food Standards Agency (FSA) it is only the whites that need to be solid. Which is right?

The WHO guidance is precautionary and applies to all bacteria and viruses throughout the world (many of which aren't present in the UK), not just to the virus that causes bird flu, which is killed by cooking. The current FSA advice is as it was before bird flu became an issue: cook eggs until the whites are solid; don't eat raw eggs or use them in dishes that won't be cooked; and always wash your hands after handling eggs.

No lion and no date

I like to buy my eggs from a lady in my village but I've noticed that they don't have the little red lion stamp or 'best-before'

date on them, like those in the supermarket. What's the difference?

The Lion mark indicates that the producer has signed up to the voluntary Lion Quality Code of Practice, run by the British Egg Industry Council. Eggs that display it have been produced under strict hygiene and food safety controls. These include compulsory vaccination against

Store eggs at a constant temperature, ideally in a fridge



much as possible, but clearly there's more to be done. Not accepting shredded paper is a backward step. If some councils can recycle shredded paper, why can't ours?

STELLA DIXON, CARDIFF

The Waste & Resources Action Programme (Wrap) says shredded paper is unwelcome at some mills, as it can cause the machinery to jam and the shorter wood fibres can weaken the final product. The smaller the strips of paper, the fiddlier they are to sort from other

recyclables. The government has set local authorities a target of recycling or composting at least 30 per cent of household waste by 2010. You can do your bit by composting your shredded bills. Some cardboard banks do accept shredded paper but check with your local authority. Enter your postcode at www.recyclenow.com to locate your nearest recycling centre.

Breakdown scores

The score system in your April report on breakdown services seems to be based on a whole



Could the hosepipe ban breach civil liberties, asks Trevor Smith

Your consumer questions answered by our experts, plus your chance to share your experiences with fellow Which? members



Ayesha Lawrence
Services research assistant
Answers this month's questions



James Tallack
Services research assistant
Advises on cooking and storing eggs

salmonella and a best-before date of 21 days from packing, rather than the 28 days required by law. Eggs without the mark may be as safe but, to be sure, you'll need to check with your supplier, who must also give a best-before date.

Cholesterol challenge

I have high cholesterol. Does that mean I shouldn't eat eggs?

Along with liver, kidneys and prawns, eggs – or, specifically, egg yolks – are higher in dietary cholesterol than other foods. But as dietary cholesterol has less impact on the levels of cholesterol in your blood than the amount of saturated fat you eat, it's better to avoid foods high in saturated fats, such as sausages, hard cheese, butter and cakes and biscuits, if you want to reduce cholesterol.

Eggs are a good source of protein and vitamin A. Generally, nutritionists agree that eating three or four a week is fine as part of a healthy, balanced diet. Some even feel it's perfectly healthy to eat six a week. But you should

think about other sources of protein in your diet in relation to the amount of eggs you'd like each week. On its 36-day tour of New Zealand last year, the British Lions rugby team ate 13,000 – 280 eggs apiece. Just a tad 'eggcessive'...

Free interpretation

Just how free are eggs that are marked free-range?

For an egg to be labelled 'free range', it must have been produced according to certain rules. These specify, among other things, the minimum space the hens must have – free-range hens can currently be kept at up to 12 per square metre in the hen house (reducing to nine per square metre by 2011). The hens should also have continuous access during the day to outside runs. Some suppliers, such as those producing organic free-range eggs certified by the Soil Association or Organic Farmers & Growers, do exceed the minimum space regulations.

can't be repaired at the roadside and may need parts or diagnostic equipment, so we think it's unfair to put too much emphasis on repairs that are successful. Encouragingly, if we changed weightings to match your suggestion, Britannia would still come out top with 74 per cent, AA would get 72 per cent (up 1), RAC would go down 1 to 67 per cent, and Green Flag would stay at the bottom with 66 per cent. We're surveying our members to find out what they consider the most crucial criteria to be, so overall weightings may change for future reports.

host of unimportant factors.

In my opinion you should have allocated 80 per cent to repairs and speed. I'd rather have a rude mechanic who fixes my car quickly than one who fails to fix it but is very nice about it. Out of interest, if these two criteria were 80 per cent, would it have affected your ranking?

HAYDN UPSTONE, BERKHAMSTED

Speed and repair are the most important criteria, which is why we weighted them heavily (30 and 20 per cent respectively). Some cars



Deana White has a query on the Telephone Preference Service

Marketing tactics

I sat with a friend as she joined my gym early this year. In order to get a 'free' starter pack of five free gifts, she had to give the phone numbers of five people. Staff said they would call them only once and if they weren't interested in joining, they'd be taken off the list. Can the gym still call if someone is registered under the Telephone Preference Service (TPS)?

DEANA WHITE, LEICESTER

The gym must check the TPS register to filter out listed numbers. If it does phone a listed number, it is in breach of the the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations. These say that a call can be made only once the recipient has given permission. The Office of the Information Commissioner can take action against companies that persistently breach the regulations.

SHARE YOUR QUESTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

You can contact us by email or post

■ letters@which.co.uk

■ Letters, PO Box 44, Hertford X, SG14 1SH

Your say

Share your stories with fellow members

Waiting in

Last month's report on deliveries and workmen that don't turn up (p20) rang a bell with many of you

What you told us

'Any delivery company able to deliver in the evenings and at weekends could become very successful indeed.'

PHILIP, PRESTON

'We placed two orders with Argos online and ended up with five delivery dates.'

STEVE, LONDON

'DHL failed to deliver my parcel, even though its website claimed it had been delivered and signed for. I phoned DHL and it found the parcel at its depot – undelivered and unsigned for!'

PAUL, HAVERHILL

'After the British Gas engineer failed to turn up in the allotted time, I heard something being pushed through my letterbox – a "sorry we missed you" card. I rushed out of the house and found the engineer about to drive off without even having knocked on the door.'

BEVERLY, CHESTER

'I've found out that companies can, on request, contact you an hour or two before arriving at your home. Even if you don't work that close to home, booking an afternoon delivery and asking for a phone call two hours before arrival means you won't lose a whole day.'

SYLVIA, MITCHAM

Next month

Have you been bitten in Bombay or poisoned in Peru?

Share your holiday health stories with fellow members

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