

CONSUMER NEWS UPDATE FROM THE NATIONAL CONSUMER FEDERATION JUNE 2006

LECTURES IN BED

A lecturer in microbiology at Bradford University has developed a process whereby his students can download his lectures to their computers and from them to their MP3 music players. This means that they do not have to even get out of bed to hear his lectures.

Several students, when questioned, said they would still attend lectures as they had better things to do in bed.

HOSPITALS TAKE ADVANTAGE WITH CASH MACHINES

The idea of cash machines in hospitals sounds a trifle odd but, on reflection, it is obviously a useful facility for those patients who can get to them and their visiting families and friends.

What spoils the idea is that some hospitals make money from every transaction. Hospitals have been getting a bad press about the high cost of parking and the high cost of making phone calls to people in hospital and this latest revelation does make one think that some hospital managers lose sight of who their customers are – sick people!

It is important to make sure that hospital parking does not cost the hospital money, and telephone facilities are a wonderful benefit for patients that has to be paid for, but to hand them over to firms in return for a useful revenue knowing that the charges levied are sometimes excessive is surely all wrong for such sensitive institutions as hospitals.

It was the *Daily Telegraph* on May 29th that printed the report about the charges levied at automated teller machines (ATMs) in hospitals. The report said that 63 hospitals made money whenever the on-site cash machines were used. They did not receive all the money charged but received a proportion.

The newspaper found that the most expensive ATM was in the Good Hope Hospital in Sutton Coldfield, on the outskirts of Birmingham, where the charge for each transaction was £1.95. At many other machines the charge was £1.85 or £1.75.

These cash machines are not bank cash machines but are operated by companies such as Cardpoint, which has the one in the hospital in Sutton Coldfield and most of the others checked by the *Daily Telegraph*. Interestingly, the paper says that

Cardpoint would make a small profit from the machines even if hospital customers were not charged. This is because banks also pay when a transaction takes place.

CREMATORIUM LIMIT

If you have the responsibility for arranging a cremation it may be as well to check whether the crematorium of your choice can accommodate the coffin. I say this because it emerged last week that a crematorium in Norwich had to turn away one coffin because it was too big to fit into the incinerator. For your information, the size that the crematorium could accommodate was up to 28 inches wide and 23 inches deep.

PLAY IN THE WORLD CLUCK

After the exciting news that that chickens get fitter and enjoy playing with footballs on higher welfare farms, you can now play the online game inspired by the footie-mad fowl. It's free, simple to use and everyone can do their bit and then pass it on.

Log on to www.worldclucksoccerskills.com from Thursday 1 June and you'll discover an inspiring interactive World Cluck game involving higher welfare Freedom Food chickens, which show their skill and fitness as they prepare for the greatest game of their lives - the World Cluck Finals - and the inevitable penalties!

After taking part, the RSPCA hopes game players will want to pass it on to as many friends as possible, making the game a real rolling success.

While gamers enjoy the challenge of the World Cluck Soccer Skills game, they can also learn about the welfare issues of millions of chickens bred for meat each week in this country - and the higher welfare alternatives available. Just one of the many benefits of rearing chickens to higher welfare standards, like the RSPCA's **Freedom Food** labelled chicken, is that the chickens have a more interesting environment that includes footballs to play with!

So, if you fancy your chances in the World Cluck this summer, play the game at: www.worldclucksoccerskills.com - oh, and don't forget to pass it on! Remember - you saw it here first!



I am sure readers know that **Freedom Food** is the RSPCA's farm assurance and food labelling scheme. Anyone concerned about the origins of their food and the welfare of the animals that produced it, should look out for eggs, meat, poultry, fish and dairy products bearing the Freedom Food logo



Kellogg's corn flakes taint advice

On 26 May 2006 Kellogg Europe Trading Ltd issued advice about a taint affecting a small number of packs within certain batches of Kellogg's Corn Flakes.

The Food Standards Agency has issued a Food Alert 'for Information'. The product affected is:

- Kellogg's Corn Flakes, 750g pack
Best before dates: 20 March 2007 – 17 May 2007 inclusive.

No other pack sizes or Kellogg products are known to be affected.

This action is as a direct result of consumer complaints to the company. The complaints received have all been of a similar nature, reporting an unusual odour on opening the product and an off taste if eaten. For further advice you can call Kellogg Consumer Service Number on 0800 731 4994 (lines are open 8am to 6pm Monday to Sunday).

Food alerts

Food alerts are the FSA's way of letting local authorities and consumers know about problems associated with food and, in some cases, providing details of specific action to be taken. They are issued under two categories:

- Food Alerts: for Action
- Food Alerts: for Information

This one is just for information.

POST OFFICES UNDER THREAT

This is not news; they have been under threat for some time now. The Royal Mail has been eying its own Crown Post Offices and wondering whether it will really need them all when the future will give us many ways to do business online that, at the moment, we visit Post Offices to carry out.

There are many levels of protest against closures, from residents' associations and Parish Councils all the way up to the House of Commons and the House of Lords. But there are changes in demographic and social conditions as well as technological changes that cause people to use Post Offices differently or perhaps less.

In an attempt to bring together the many strands in the debate about Post Offices POSTCOMM is to hold a debate that will involve the leading interested parties. These include The Post Office Ltd, the National Federation of sub Postmasters, Postwatch and the Communications Workers Union. There will also be a speaker from La Poste who will outline some of the French postal authority's initiatives.

There is a chance for you to have your say as the event has been designed to encourage feedback from the audience. The debate will be held at The Hilton Metropolitan Hotel at the NEC, Birmingham on July 5th and entry is by invitation. If you would like one then contact Jessica Collett at POSTCOMM on 020 7593 2156 or Jessica.collett@psc.gov.uk

If you cannot attend but have a point to make you can send it in by email to:

postofficedebate@psc.gov.uk

MISLEADING HOME BUYER STOPPED

Well we hope Mr. Keith Fryer, trading as Capital Funding, will now cease to mislead home sellers that he is making an unconditional offer to buy their houses when, in fact, the offer is conditional on him being able to find someone to buy the property from him.

The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) reported on 24th May that he had given nineteen undertakings as to his future conduct of business to the High Court. This followed the OFT seeking an injunction because it was believed that he was misleading consumers about his ability to purchase their properties. If he breaks any of these undertakings he will run the risk of being found in contempt of court. This could lead to imprisonment, a fine, or having his assets seized.

What he was doing was to offer to buy houses unconditionally and ask for a "processing fee" in advance, which he promised to refund on completion of the purchase. Of course when he failed to find a buyer the completion did not take place and he did not return the processing fee either.

Among the many undertakings that Mr. Fryer has given is to refrain from saying that his business is a company when it is not incorporated and he is the sole proprietor. He also undertakes to refrain from giving the impression that the 'company' has a Head Office, a Legal Department, an Administration Office and many other departments when, in fact it has none of these.

Mr. Fryer operated two similar businesses, Unity Investments Ltd. and Equity Options Ltd, both of which were closed down by the Department of Trade and Industry in 2004.

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