

INTRODUCTION

National law on the hallmarking of precious metals has recently changed. The new controls will have important implications for both businesses and consumers. This guidance leaflet offers advice on a number of the most common questions prompted by the changes.

SUMMARY

The main changes are, from 1 January 1999;

- UK manufacturers can now produce articles in a wider range of finenesses
- Items marked in another member state under equivalent arrangements to our national controls can be sold in the UK so some new hallmarks will appear (see later)
- The precise form of UK hallmark has changed. The date letter will no longer be compulsory and the fineness must be marked in parts per thousand.

COMMON QUESTIONS

Q. Why has the law on hallmarking changed?

A. The UK had to amend the Hallmarking Act 1973, to reflect developments in Europe. In so doing a number of additional changes have been made to ensure UK manufacturers are not disadvantaged.

Q. What are the major changes I can expect to see?

A. The new law permits the supply of items marked in other member states under a hallmarking system similar to that in the UK. Over time this may mean that items will appear bearing marks from other countries.

As well as increasing the number of marks, the law will recognise a number of additional finenesses. This will include the following which can be struck by UK assay offices

	<i>Parts per thousand</i>											
<i>Metal</i>	375	585	750	800	850	900	916.6	925	950	958.4	990	999
Silver				*				*		*		*
Gold	*	*	*				*				*	*
Platinum					*	*			*			*

It is likely other finenesses will be permitted if legally available in another member state that operates hallmarking controls comparable with our own. The British Hallmarking Council will maintain a list of all the recognised hallmarks and standards of fineness.

Q. Will there be any other differences?

A. In future the UK hallmark will look different because

- it is no longer compulsory to include a date letter
- the fineness will invariably be marked in parts per thousand
- the same mark will be applied to domestic and imported articles hallmarked in the UK

Q. What about antiques?

A. The final change made by the legislation is the date at which an article can be described as “antique”. The new date of 1920 (it used to be 1900) will mean that items of gold and silver produced in the first twenty years of this century now enjoy exemption from hallmarking.

Q. Can the fineness of items still be described in carats?

A. Yes. The law does not affect the way in which finenesses can be described. The only change relates to the mark itself, which in future must give the fineness in parts per thousand. Traditional fineness marks (e.g. the lion or the crown) can be struck alongside this if requested by the manufacturer.

Q. Which countries’ hallmarks are considered to be acceptable?

A. Currently the following member states have equivalent arrangements to the UK and so would be acceptable; Austria, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland. In addition the Czech Republic is a participant in the Vienna International Convention which means hallmarks that are struck in that Country are also recognised in the UK .

Q. How are consumers going to learn about the changes?

A. The Department of Trade and Industry is publicising the changes.

The law also continues to place an obligation on dealers to exhibit a public notice describing the approved hallmarks. The British Hallmarking Council controls the form of the notice and a new version has been prepared to explain the recent changes. Copies of this notice and supplementary information sheets are available from the Council at the address given at the end.

Aberdeenshire Council Environmental Health & Consumer Protection have prepared these notes. They are provided purely for guidance purposes as only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

Q. What should I do if offered goods with an unfamiliar mark or I have any further queries?

A. Further advice and guidance is available from a number of sources including:

British Hallmarking Council
St Philips House,
St Philips Place,
Birmingham B3 2PP

Assay Office,
Goldsmith Hall,
24 Broughton Street,
Edinburgh EH1 3RH

Consumer Protection & Support Services
Gordon House
Blackhall Road
INVERURIE AB51 3WA
Tel: 01467 628323 Fax: 01467 628117

or

Consumer Protection & Support Services
10 Commerce Street,
Fraserburgh AB43 9AQ
Tel: 01346 510505 Fax: 01346 510484

Changes to the Hallmarking Act

Guidance Notes for Traders



Planning and Environmental Services