



News Release

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NUMBER PLATE SUPPLIERS CONVICTED

This week saw the first convictions under the Vehicles (Crime) Act with the prosecution of two vehicle number plate suppliers for supplying number plates without obtaining documentary evidence to support entitlement to buy them.

Trade Direct of Sheffield, and Sure Signs of Kingswinford, West Midlands, were successfully prosecuted under the Act, which was introduced last year in a bid to make it more difficult for thieves to dispose of stolen vehicles. Under the Act, all businesses that sell number plates in England and Wales are required to register with DVLA and make important document checks before supplying a vehicle number plate.

Trade Direct and Sure Signs were prosecuted for supplying vehicle number plates without obtaining documentary evidence, both companies received fines of £300 and costs of £344.37. Sure Signs was also prosecuted for supplying a vehicle number plate displaying an invalid registration number.

Both these prosecutions resulted from a joint operation between Trading Standards and DVLA at last November's Motorcycle Show in Birmingham's NEC.

DVLA is determined to improve the enforcement effort against those who abuse the number plate regulations and has appointed full-time enforcement officers to advise and support police and trading standards officers, with whom the Agency works closely to secure convictions under the Act.

DVLA Director Trevor Horton said:

"Legitimate number plate suppliers are working hard to ensure that their plates conform to the British Standard and that they are sold for the correct vehicle. Others continue to ignore the rules, but the recent prosecutions show that the legislation does have teeth and will be enforced effectively."

Vehicle crime is the largest category of recorded crime, although the number of vehicles reported as stolen is falling steadily. A total of 278,000 vehicles were stolen in 2002/03, compared with 378,000 in 1998/99. Forty seven per cent of vehicles stolen in 2002/03 remain unrecovered and the police estimate that 25% of unrecovered vehicles have their identities disguised with false number plates.

There is also evidence from DVLA's ANPR cameras that some motorists use false number plates to evade charges and fines.

DVLA, Longview Road, Swansea, SA6 7JL Tel.01792 782318

An executive agency of the Department for Transport



NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The **Vehicles (Crime) Act 2001** came into force on the 1 January 2003 as an anti vehicle crime measure, requiring all businesses that sell number plates in England and Wales to register with DVLA. The legislation was designed to make it more difficult for thieves to dispose of stolen vehicles. All rung vehicles require a change of registration plate – this is the practice of using the identity of a scrapped vehicle to disguise a stolen vehicle. Documentary evidence is required to comply with the **Registration of Registration Plate Suppliers (England and Wales) Regulations 2002**. Number plate suppliers must check documents such as the vehicle registration document and a photocard driving licence to ensure that plates are sold only to people who can prove their entitlement to the registration number requested and can confirm their own identity. Registered suppliers must also keep records of all sales and make them available for inspection by police or trading standards.

2. In addition, the Act made it an offence to supply counterfeit number plates. The specifications for number plates are detailed in the **Road Vehicles (Display of Registration Marks) Regulations 2001**, as amended, and define amongst other things the font, size and spacing of characters. The materials to be used are covered by **British Standards BS AU 145d**. Compliant number plates ensure that Automated Number Plate Reader (ANPR) cameras and witnesses to vehicle crime do not have difficulty reading plates that would otherwise be misrepresented.

3. Whilst the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) administers the scheme, only the police or persons appointed by local authorities have powers to prosecute for infringements. DVLA's enforcement effort is therefore geared to liaising with these enforcement authorities. To improve compliance further, the Government is considering new legislation to enable DVLA officials to enforce directly.

Contact Numbers

Press Enquiries	01792 782318
General Enquiries	0870 240 0010