



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A WEEE ENFORCEMENT OFFICER

As an Enforcement Officer with the VCA, the agency responsible for monitoring and enforcing the distributor's (or retailer's) obligations under the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Regulations, my primary role is to conduct inspection visits to gather evidence of how retailers are complying with these requirements. You will find me and my enforcement colleagues a visible presence in High Streets and retail parks around the UK carrying out this work and we also conduct 'online inspections' for internet sellers.

Retailers supplying electrical and electronic equipment to household users are required to assist their customers in disposing of the old, equivalent item at home that they may be replacing, in an environmentally friendly way. Retailers have the option of offering to take back the old item in store and disposing of it for their customers, or joining a scheme, the Distributor Takeback Scheme, that permits them to direct customers to take their local recycling centre themselves. Whichever option is chosen, the retailer is required to provide written information promoting the environmental benefits of separating WEEE from other waste streams and how they will help their customers in doing this. Products covered by the WEEE Regulations are marked by a crossed-out wheeled bin symbol to indicate they shouldn't just be thrown in the bin when finished with and the retailer's in-store literature should also explain this. I will check that items are correctly marked during my visit, but this is the responsibility of the producer of the item, not the person supplying it.

My daily visits may be entirely at random in a High Street, town centre or retail park anywhere in the UK, or more targeted in response to concerns raised by consumers or as a result of market research previously conducted by VCA Mystery Shoppers.

On arrival at a store I will be looking for the steps a retailer has taken to make their in-store information readily available for the customer. Is there a poster? Are there shelf labels? Are leaflets accessible? All retailers are required to proactively promote the WEEE recycling message to their customers. I will also approach staff to check their knowledge of the regulations and in particular how their store is meeting its' obligations. If staff don't know, how can they correctly advise their customers, I will speak to a member of the management team to explain the purpose of my visit and pursue any concerns that may have been identified. This is particularly important when a store is part of a larger chain as we encourage store managers to feed back our findings to their bosses.

An import part of my role at this stage is assisting the retailer to meet their obligations. To that end I will provide information and contacts for a retailer to use in achieving compliance and all visits are followed up by a letter asking them to confirm how they will improve their practices to do this. We maintain this communication until we are satisfied that compliance has been achieved.



Those retailers who do not appear to be taking appropriate steps to meet their obligations will be re-visited as we follow a possible route to prosecution – a path we would rather avoid, but ultimately available to us in protecting consumer rights in the world of WEEE.

Please email us if you would like further information – weee@vca.gov.uk