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trading standards law explained

Hallmarking

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In this guide, the words 'must' or 'must not' are used where there is a legal requirement to do (or not do) something. The word 'should' is used where there is established legal guidance or best practice that is likely to help you avoid breaking the law.

This guidance is for England, Scotland and Wales

Selling and buying jewellery and other articles of gold, silver, platinum and palladium (precious metals) is controlled by the Hallmarking Act 1973.

Any article made of a precious metal must contain an approved hallmark.

It is an offence to apply the description gold, silver, platinum or palladium (precious metal) to an article, or to supply or offer to supply an article described as a precious metal, if the description is not true.

An article may be described as plated with a precious metal, provided that the description is true. It is also permitted to use the description rolled gold if the description is true.

Approved hallmarks

An approved hallmark is one that has been applied by a United Kingdom Assay Office to an article made of precious metal.

The UK is part of the Hallmarking Convention. All member countries can apply the Common Control Mark, which will then be accepted in all other member countries. Members of the Convention are Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

Hallmarks from countries in the European Economic Area are also accepted if they were applied before the end of the post-Brexit transition period on 31 December 2020. The UK no longer accepts any new items from European countries that are not members of the Hallmarking Convention.

An article is considered to be unhallmarked if it does not bear the approved hallmarks and a sponsor's mark.

A hallmarked article is considered to be unhallmarked if it has been the subject of an improper repair.

Only registered sponsors' marks may be used as part of the hallmarking process for new articles.

Any article of precious metal submitted to a UK Assay Office must have the following marks applied:

- sponsor's mark (indicating who submitted the article for hallmarking)
- Assay Office mark (identifying which office tested the item)
- fineness mark (confirming the precious metal composition)

There are two optional marks that can be added:

- pictorial mark (such as the sterling silver lion)
- date letter (the style of the letter determines the date)

Sponsors' marks

If you wish to have an article of precious metal struck with the approved hallmarks by an Assay Office, you must first have it struck with an authorised sponsor's mark. Alternatively, you can arrange for an Assay Office to strike your sponsor's mark when they strike the approved hallmarks. The sponsor's mark indicates the maker of the item or the person who commissioned it; it must be registered with the Assay Office.

Exemptions

There are some exemptions from the requirement to hallmark items of precious metal. These include coins and articles that would be damaged by the hallmarking process.

There are also exemptions for items under a specified weight, which varies depending upon the precious metal involved. An item is exempt if it weighs less than:

- 1 g for gold
- 7.78 g for silver
- 0.5 g for platinum
- 1 g for palladium

Dealers' notice

Any person that deals in precious metals must display on their premises, in a conspicuous position, a Hallmarking Act 1973 notice, as approved by the British Hallmarking Council.

Dealers' notices may be downloaded from the websites of any of the Assay Offices, which are based in Birmingham, Edinburgh, London and Sheffield.

If this electronic version of the dealer's notice is printed for shop use, it must meet the following criteria:

- printed in black and white
- clearly legible
- printed in its entirety with no amendments, additions or deletions
- printed minimum A4 size (210 mm x 297 mm portrait)

The full version of the dealers' notice is not ideal for use online; therefore, a second version was been developed, known as dealers' notice B. See the downloads page of the London Assay Office website for more information.

Weighing instruments

The weighing of precious metals for sale or for purchase is strictly regulated by the Weights and Measures Act 1985. Weighing instruments used to determine the weight of precious metals for sale or purchase must be approved and exhibit the appropriate Government stickers. Only weighing instruments of class I or class II can be used for the sale or purchase of precious metals.

See 'Weighing equipment for legal use' for more information.

Nickel, lead and cadmium

Nickel, lead and cadmium are considered to be undesirable contaminants in jewellery, and their content is strictly controlled.

See 'Jewellery safety: metal content' for more information.

Further information

The British Hallmarking Council (BHC) has produced hallmarking guidance notes.

The BHC has also produced guidance on hallmarking requirements and the EU.

Both are available on the GOV.UK website.

Trading Standards

For more information on the work of Trading Standards services - and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law - please see 'Trading Standards: powers, enforcement and penalties'.

In this update

No major changes.

Last reviewed / updated: July 2025

Key legislation

- Hallmarking Act 1973
- Consumer Rights Act 2015

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links go to the legislation.gov.uk website. The site usually updates the legislation to include any amendments made to it. However, this is not always the case. Information on all changes made to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

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