

Hallmarking

gold, silver and platinum

Trading Standards Information

www.southwark.gov.uk

1. Introduction

The Hallmarking Act 1973 controls the selling of items described as gold, silver or platinum. A hallmark is a series of small official marks applied to guarantee the purity and date of manufacture of articles made from these precious metals. Items are usually submitted for hallmarking by the manufacturer or importer and the controls are one of the oldest forms of trade and consumer protection.

2. Main legal requirements

- Articles described as being wholly or partly made of gold, silver or platinum must bear appropriate hallmarks before they can be supplied or offered for supply.
- Unhallmarked articles cannot be described as being wholly or partly made of gold, silver or platinum.

There are a number of exceptions to these requirements - these are outlined in section 3.

- An A4 size approved explanatory hallmarking notice must be displayed for customers in premises where articles made of gold, silver or platinum are made, supplied, sold or exchanged etc.

Approved notices are issued by the British Hallmarking Council - details given in section 9.

Any claims regarding articles made of precious metals will also be subject to the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 and even if hallmarking is not required articles must be accurately described.

3. When are hallmarks etc. not required?

There are a number of circumstances when hallmarking is not required;

- i) Where the following descriptions are applied;
 - gold plated or rolled gold.
 - silver or platinum plated.
 - where the description is implicitly or expressly confined to the colour of the article.
- ii) The requirements do not apply to the following **provided they are of minimum fineness**;

- Any article containing only one precious metal of a weight **less** than that specified below (i.e. weight exclusive of other material which is clearly distinguishable from the precious metal);

gold - 1 gram

silver - 7.78 grams

platinum - 0.5 grams

- Certain gold and silver items made before 1st January 1975.
- Musical instrument mouthpieces.
- Any article which is wholly or mainly gold, or of silver, or of gold and silver assaying, made before 1920 and which has not undergone any improper alterations since 1920.

'Fineness' means the ratio of precious metal to alloy in the article and is expressed in parts per thousand. For gold minimum fineness is 375 (9 carats), for silver 800 (formally 925 sterling) and for platinum 850 (formally 950).

iii) the hallmarking requirements do not apply to the following articles;

- Current or former coinage.
- Articles intended for medicinal, dental, veterinary or scientific purposes.
- Gold or silver thread, raw materials and battered or incomplete articles.
- Platinum articles made before 1st January 1975.

4. Changes to allow free trade in the EU

- items marked in another EU Member State under equivalent arrangements to our national controls can be sold in the UK. This is likely to lead to some new hallmarks appearing;
- where other Member States with equivalent marking arrangements permit additional fineness standards, for example 999 gold, these can now be lawfully supplied in the UK. Moreover, UK manufacturers can also produce articles to a wider range of finenesses; and
- the date letter will no longer be required
- the fineness must be marked in parts per thousand.
- there will be no mark to distinguish British goods from imported goods marked here

5. Additional finenesses

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:

Parts Per Thousand												
Metal	375	585	750	800	850	900	916	925	950	958.4	990	999
Silver				✓				✓		✓		✓
Gold	✓	✓	✓				✓				✓	✓
Platinum					✓	✓			✓			✓

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It is likely that other fineness will be permitted if legally available in another Member State which operates hallmarking controls comparable with our own. The British Hallmarking Council (see address at the end) will maintain a list of all the recognised hallmarks and the relevant standards of fineness.

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

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 millesimal form, i.e. in parts per thousand.

Traditional fineness marks (e.g. the lion or the crown) can be struck alongside this - if requested by the manufacturer.

9. Further information

If you require further assistance on the requirements, or would like additional information leaflets, please contact us at the address is given. Assay Offices Can be found in London ☎020 7606 8975 or Birmingham 0121 200 3300, Edinburgh and Sheffield.

An approved explanatory hallmarking notice can be obtained by post for approximately £10.00 inclusive of p&p from;

The British Hallmarking Council,
PO Box 18133,
London EC2V 8JY.