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**MTA SOLICITORS WARNS BRITS THAT THEY COULD BE ACCIDENTLY
BREAKING THE LAW EVERY DAY**

Revealed today: The five most common ways to break the law without realising

The recent case of Wiltshire couple Amanda and Michael Stacey highlights just how easy it is to unintentionally break the law. The husband and wife duo have been issued with an 11-month suspended sentence for cashing in a £30,000 lottery ticket found on a shop floor, and for spending half of it. They have been ordered to repay the other half.

MTA Solicitors today reveals the top five most likely ways that people innocently break the law in a bid to warn Brits that it is definitely worth double-checking legal advice if you are in any doubt that what you are doing is illegal. Failure to do so could leave you in very deep water.

David Green, CEO at MTA Solicitors, explains "In the case of Amanda and Michael Stacey, although the adage 'finders keepers losers weepers' is often quoted by those who claim rights over their discoveries, it holds little sway in a court of law."

A finder may eventually earn the right to keep discovered property if they take the correct steps to find whoever lost it. If you find something in the street, the law says you have more right to it than anyone else - except the owner. You can eventually take ownership of the item, but not without making significant effort to find out who it belonged to in the first place.

Green continues, 'It is worth being aware of the many ways that you can unwittingly break the law without even knowing you're doing it. You don't want to find yourself being prosecuted for something that you didn't even realise you had done.'

MTA is warning people to beware of the following most likely ways that people unconsciously break the law:

1. Mobile Phones

Most drivers own a mobile phone and whilst everyone is probably aware that they must have a hands-free device in order to legally use their mobile phone whilst driving, many do not know the full extent of the law and can find themselves in deep water.

Since February 2007, using a hand held mobile telephone whilst driving attracts penalty points. The same applies to the use of any communication device whilst driving – such as in-car satellite navigation systems, computers or Blackberry devices.

The offence will be committed even if you are sitting stationary in traffic unless the engine is switched off. A passenger may also be prosecuted for this offence if they were using their phone whilst supervising a learner driver.

Employers may also find themselves prosecuted for permitting this offence, where they require employees to use or answer phones whilst driving.

Maximum penalty for this offence is 3 Penalty Points, and a fine up to £1000.

2. Driving the morning after drinking

Only a minority of drink driving convictions are for people who actually realised they were over the limit, the majority are for people who simply didn't realise that what they'd drunk could hit the positive button on the breathalyser. One of the biggest misconceptions people have is over 'morning after' driving. They simply don't think that the alcohol they consumed the night before could still be in their blood stream the next morning. If it's a bottle of wine for example, then it'll take a full 12 hours from the time you finish drinking to the point when you're back under the limit and legal to drive.

Despite what many people believe, there is no way to speed up the process of sobering up. Coffee or Tea may make you more alert, but it will not get rid of the alcohol that is still in your body.

Some also believe that sucking on a 2p copper coin mixes with alcohol in the mouth and causes the Breathalyzer to give a green light. This is an urban myth and has been disproved

in various studies. If you want to avoid losing your licence for a year or longer, the only advice is not to take *any* risks. It's just not worth it.

You could land yourself with a minimum disqualification of 12 months, in some cases community service or a custodial sentence, and a fine of approximately a weeks wages.

3. Leaving the children home alone

We're not talking about abandoning your toddler for two weeks while you jet off to sunnier climes but you could be breaking the law by leaving your 11 and eight year old home alone for the evening, while you go to the pub – even if you are five minutes away with your mobile phone and they are happy to be left. According to the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 parents can be prosecuted for neglect if they leave a child alone 'in a manner likely to cause unnecessary suffering or injury to health' but nothing more specific than that. There is no minimum age to leave a child unattended or at which one child can look after another. The NSPCC recommendation is that no child is left alone before the age of 12 and that babysitters are over the age of 16.

The penalty ranges from a fine up to 10 years imprisonment.

4. Correct insurance

There has been a surge in the number of prosecutions where people have been prosecuted because they do not have the correct insurance use for their vehicle. Many people insure their vehicle for social, domestic and pleasure use, and do not realise that this does not cover commuting to work. Travelling to a railway station en route, where the car is parked, is classed as commuting. In addition, dropping someone else off at their place of work may also be classed as commuting – so it is worth checking the policy beforehand to double-check.

For this offence you could get 6-8 Points, and a fine up to £2,500.

5. Copying software /DVDs

Are you a virtual shoplifter? According to the IT industry, cyber theft is huge and growing. We wouldn't steal things from a shop but some of us are perfectly comfortable downloading games or films for the kids from the net without paying for them or copying expensive programs from friends. The fact is, this is theft and once that new icon is on your desktop, you are eating into someone's profits somewhere.

Depending on the seriousness of the offence you could get:

- imprisonment for up to six months or a fine not exceeding £5,000 in the Magistrates Court;
- or
- imprisonment for up to ten years or an unlimited fine in the Crown Court

-ENDS-

About MTA Solicitors:

Established in 2001, MTA Solicitors provides a wide range of legal services including personal injury, employment, debt, corporate law, general and commercial litigation and dispute resolution (including arbitration), IT and e-commerce, banking and finance, trusts, wills and probate, trust litigation and contentious probate.

MTA Solicitors clients' span across many different business sectors in the UK and overseas; including major UK and global insurance companies, domestic and foreign banks, foreign law firms, offshore trustees, transport operators, local authorities, agents and service providers, and individuals.

MTA has offices based in London, Kent and Manchester and employs over 250 lawyers. Please visit: www.mtasolicitors.com for further information