

Prohibiting Blades in Wholesale: FAQs

What is the Offensive Weapons Act 2019?

The Offensive Weapons Act 2019 (**OWA**) is a new piece of legislation being introduced by the Government. It is being introduced in response to and to combat the recent increase in knife and violent crime.

It is currently the law that retailers are only permitted to sell blades to individuals aged 18 or over. However the compliance in the online sector is very low. Therefore one of the main aims of the OWA is to prohibit the online sale and then delivery of blades to persons who are under 18 years of age.

When does the OWA come into effect?

It is expected to come fully into force in mid-November 2019. We are in contact with the Home Office and will inform Wholesale customers as soon as the Home Office confirms the actual effective date to us.

How does the OWA affect the Royal Mail Group (RMG)?

In very simple terms RMG may be criminally liable if it delivers a blade to someone who is aged under 18, if the blade has been purchased from an online retailer.

How does the OWA affect Wholesale customers?

In very simple terms both a retailer who sends blades using couriers and the courier company delivering such blades may be criminally liable if that blade is delivered into the hands of an individual who is under 18 years old.

This means that Wholesale customers who carry blades for its own customers may be held criminally liable if it hands over such items to Royal Mail Wholesale, and such items are delivered to an individual who is under 18 years old.

What are the implications if you are held to be criminally liable?

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, businesses held to be criminally liable under the OWA can receive an unlimited fine. In our view the actual fine will likely be between £10,000 and £20,000 - and our view is based on fines issued in relation to comparable offences, for example where a supermarket sells alcohol to an under 18 year old.

In Scotland, businesses can receive a fine up to £5,000.

What is a bladed product?

The OWA defines 'Bladed Products' as "a bladed article which (a) is or has a blade, and (b) is capable of causing a serious injury to a person which involves cutting that person's skin".

Why is the Royal Mail Group prohibiting blades?

We are fully supportive of the Government's drive to reduce knife crime, and we also want to take the necessary steps to ensure both our customers and ourselves avoid potential criminal liability and any reputational harm.

Therefore, Royal Mail Group, including Wholesale, is taking the prudent and reasonable measure to prohibit blades from being posted through any of our standard services, including through the Access network.

Is there any guidance on the OWA from the Government?

The Home Office issued [draft guidance](#) on 15 August 2019. The Home Office is now receiving comments on and is consulting interested parties in respect of this guidance, following this consultation period it will issue final guidance.