

CMA examines concerns about heating oil

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The CMA is examining heating oil amid concerns about rising prices due to conflict in the Middle East.

The ongoing conflict in the Middle East is driving up wholesale prices for key commodities such as oil. Inevitably, this is having an impact on the prices consumers pay for fuel, in particular the cost of heating oil, which powers around 1.5 million UK homes, predominantly in rural areas, and is the main source of fuel for heating in Northern Ireland.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) knows that many retailers behave responsibly and fairly – and that they are likely to face significant pressures from rising wholesale costs, which may impact prices. However, the CMA has heard a number of concerning reports from consumers who rely on heating oil about their experiences with retailers in recent days. The CMA will therefore be engaging with heating oil suppliers and intermediaries to gather evidence and consider whether retailers' practices raise consumer protection law concerns.

An initial review of complaints has identified 2 main issues, which the CMA will be probing further:

- existing orders for heating oil being cancelled, and customers then being offered new quotes at significantly increased prices
- price increases for automated deliveries (triggered when the fuel in a tank drops to a certain level)

Sarah Cardell, Chief Executive of the CMA, said:

We know many households are worried about rising prices as global events push up wholesale oil costs. It's inevitable that some prices will rise, but they should reflect genuine cost pressures.

We've heard troubling reports from heating oil customers about cancelled orders and sudden price increases – and are moving quickly to get to the bottom of these concerns. As always, we stand by consumers and will make sure they are treated fairly.

The CMA, as a matter of urgency, is writing to a number of firms – both direct suppliers and intermediaries – to seek further information about their practices.

The CMA is at the initial stage of its review, and it should not be assumed that any businesses have broken consumer protection law.

How the review progresses will depend on the evidence – this could include the CMA taking no further action if it believes that consumer protection law is unlikely to have been breached, or taking enforcement action if potential breaches are identified.

Notes to editors

1. Media enquiries should be directed to press@cma.gov.uk or 020 3738 6460.
2. The CMA is using its consumer enforcement powers under the Digital Markets, Competition

and Consumers Act 2024.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cma-examines-concerns-about-heating-oil>