

MIXED METALS & PRE 1950 ARTICLES GUIDANCE NOTES

BACKGROUND

Changes to the Hallmarking legislation which came into force on April 6th 2007 have created new opportunities for the Jewellery industry and offer consumers more accurate descriptions of the items they are purchasing.

Historically the Hallmarking Act has prevented the Assay Offices from hallmarking items made of a mixture of precious and base metals, and the regulations for mixed precious metal items have been very restricting. This has resulted in misleading descriptions because if a precious metal item is not hallmarked then it can not be described as such. Significant anomalies have arisen, particularly for expensive items such as 18ct Gold and Stainless Steel watches which have had to be described as “yellow metal” and stainless steel.

Consumers and the jewellery industry will benefit from the changes which will allow for much more accurate descriptions of both upmarket mixed precious metal products and also fashionable lower priced pieces.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE HALLMARKED?

- Anything which is to be described as silver, gold or platinum must be hallmarked if it is to be sold as such, unless it falls beneath the appropriate exemption weight.
- All precious metals must be of the minimum legal fineness or the article cannot be hallmarked.
Any precious metal below the minimum fineness means the article cannot be marked at all.
Precious metals below the minimum fineness cannot be regarded as a base Metal.
- Exemption Weights for Mixed Precious and Non-Precious Articles are based on the **total weight of metal in the article** (ie excluding stones or other non metal parts).

The standard exemption weights apply so:

- **Platinum**
All articles with a component to be described as platinum in which the **total weight of all metal is over 0.5 grams** will need to be hallmarked.
- **Gold**

All articles with a component to be described as gold in which the **total weight of all metal is over 1 gram** will need to be hallmarked.

- **Silver**

All articles with a component to be described as silver in which the **total weight of all metal is over 7.78 grams** will need to be hallmarked.

REGULATIONS FOR ARTICLES OF TWO OR MORE PRECIOUS METALS

- The item can only be marked if, in the opinion of the Assay Office, an ordinary person will be able to determine which part is which precious metal.
- Each precious metal component must be at least the minimum legal fineness for that metal ie: Gold 375. Silver 800. Platinum 850 (parts per thousand).
- The full hallmark (Assay Office and fineness mark) struck will be that of the least precious metal, in order, silver, gold and platinum. This will normally be struck on the appropriate metal.
- The minor (fineness) mark will be stamped on the “higher” precious metals.

Anomalies

- Where small components are used the above may not be possible. In these circumstances the following rules apply:
 1. If it is not practical to stamp the fineness marks on the “higher” precious metals, they may be stamped on the lower precious metals.
 2. If this is not practical then the fineness marks can be stamped on another precious metal part.
 3. If neither of these options are practical, then the full (Assay Office and least precious metal fineness) mark will be applied on the least precious metal part and all other marks omitted.
- When a platinum article has small component parts consisting of gold and the gold parts are of a fineness of 750ppt or higher, then the article may be hallmarked with a platinum full mark and the appropriate gold fineness mark. This will not apply if the gold components are 585 or 375ppt. The gold fineness mark can be applied anywhere on the article.

REGULATIONS FOR ARTICLES OF PRECIOUS METAL PARTS AND OTHER MATERIALS

- A mixed precious metal and base metal article, or an article of mixed precious metal and other materials, can only be hallmarked if any precious metal component is at least the minimum legal fineness for that metal i.e. Gold 375. Silver 800. Platinum 850 (parts per thousand).

If an article includes base metal parts

1. Those base metal parts must be clearly distinguishable from precious metal parts by colour and/or texture and must be clearly visible by their extent.
 2. The word + METAL must be applied next to the hallmark on the precious metal part.
 3. Whenever practical the word METAL or the name of the metal should also be struck on the base metal part/s (brass, stainless steel, titanium etc), in a manner which complies with any Regulation made by The British Hallmarking Council.
 4. The hallmark can only be applied to the precious metal component. Sufficient space must also be available adjacent to the hallmark for the addition of the "+METAL" mark."
- If the article does not include base metal parts, but other materials, then:
 - The other materials must be clearly distinguishable from any precious metal part.
 - The non-precious metal part must not be plated to resemble any precious metal.
 - The extent of each part must be clearly visible.
 - The precious metal part must be of a thickness of not less than 100 micrometres.
 - A mixed material article containing only a single precious metal will be hallmarked on the precious metal part only, as if it was a separate article.
 - For an article with more than one precious metal and a base metal the rules which apply to hallmarking Mixed Precious Metals apply.
 - NB Articles must still comply with the UK Nickel regulations

PRE 1950'S EXEMPTION

6th April 2007 also sees another amendment to hallmarking legislation in respect of items originally brought on to the market pre 1950.

Before 1975, many precious metal articles (e.g. rings, whatever their weight, other than wedding rings) were exempted from hallmarking. Platinum was not

hallmarked at all. Any article covered by these exemptions, if (a) of minimum fineness* (b) proved to have been manufactured before 1975, may still be described and sold as precious metal.

However, even articles which should have been hallmarked when they were made, but bear no hallmark, are now treated as exempt if they were manufactured before a specific date. Since 1999, the date has been 1920, but the amended legislation alters this date to 1950. Therefore, any pre-1950 item may now be described and sold as precious metal, **if the seller can prove that it is of minimum fineness and was manufactured before 1950.**

*Gold, 375 parts per thousand; silver, 800 parts per thousand