



Information Network Bulletin

Autumn Edition

2014

Welcome to the latest edition of the Information Network Bulletin brought to you by
Croydon Council's Trading Standards team.

In addition to general news from the team, it includes details of some of the latest scams
and fraud alerts which we have become aware of in recent months.

We hope that you find it useful.

BOGUS BOILER OFFER

A local resident has reported receiving a telephone call from a company claiming to be offering a government scheme to give people new gas boilers at a discounted price.



Without asking any questions as to their eligibility, or even asking the age of their present boiler, they told the couple that they were entitled to a discounted boiler which they would be round to fit the following week. In return they would have to make an upfront payment of £300.

The couple's boiler was only 5 years old and they had no wish to replace it, so their intention was to turn the company away if they turned up at their house.

If you want to find out if you are eligible for a government grant to assist with your heating bills or to improve the energy efficiency of your home, you go to the government website and answer some simple questions.

The webpage to visit is: <https://www.gov.uk/energy-grants-calculator>

This webpage also has links to information on other heating and housing benefits, which you may be eligible for.

RESIDENTS WARNED OF SHAM TRADING STANDARDS OFFICERS



Rogue traders claiming to be from the council's Trading Standards team are operating in the south of the borough with the aim of ripping off unsuspecting householders.

Residents are warned to be wary of callers to their front door by men who, on the face of things, sound and appear entirely credible, stating that they are from the Trading Standards department.

They claim to be working in the area, carrying out visual inspections of the guttering and drainage fittings on houses, and advising residents if they feel work is required to their property.

Trading standards officers would never cold call in this way and do not carry out inspections of this kind.

It is not known how many people have been approached by the scammers, nor how many have fallen for the sham advice and offered the work to the company recommended by the cold callers.

One resident in Whyteleafe was sufficiently concerned to alert the Kenley Safer Neighbourhoods Team after politely declining their offer.

Councillor Mark Watson, cabinet member for safety and justice, said: "This is a worrying development, one that's designed to prey on the trusting nature of some of our older, or more vulnerable, residents. At the moment, we know they're operating in the south of the borough but all residents should be on their guard.

"The fraudsters' line of patter is quite believable and they try to convince householders that their property could be at risk unless work is carried out immediately.

"The Whyteleafe resident's reaction was exactly the right thing to do – ask to see identification and check that it's genuine, firmly but politely say 'no', don't let them into the house, and then alert the police. A quick telephone call could result in the fraudsters being picked up while they're still in the area."

A TIMELY REMINDER

As the clocks go back and Autumn nights draw in they bring with them the seasonal problems of cold callers offering to clear out your gutters and drains in good time for winter.

Every year around this time, Trading Standards departments across the country see a sharp increase in the number of reports of traders preying on the unsuspecting resident, claiming that essential home maintenance tasks are performed immediately, by them there and then.

The jobs offered could include moss clearance from roofs, high power jet washing of roofs and drives, gutter clearances and roof repairs. Many will offer an additional service of painting or treating roof tiles with chemicals which they claim improves waterproofing and prevents moss re-growth.

Don't fall for it. If you need the work doing then seek a price from a reputable trader - ideally three – and listen to their advice.

Try:



Tel: 01344 666 104 (operating 24/7)

Or



Tel: 020 8680 5450

Keep up with Phishing and Identity Theft scams

Want to keep up with the latest phishing and identity theft email scams?

Take a look at the website:

www.millersmiles.co.uk

The website has an archive of numerous scams and shows the most recent on its front page. You can also look up previous scams targeting various banks and building societies.

Good Neighbours Stop Rogue Traders

Latest research shows there could be as many as 170,000 incidents of doorstep crime each year – and that's not including the cases that never come to light. Doorstep criminals exploit vulnerable citizens by convincing them to pay for shoddy or incomplete repair work, charging extortionate fees for their services, or threatening residents who do not comply.

National Consumer Week 3 - 7th November 2014 is launching the 'Good neighbours stop rogue traders' campaign, which focuses on preventing doorstep crime by encouraging neighbours, family, friends and carers to look out for those most at risk in their communities.

We would encourage anyone with elderly or vulnerable neighbours to act as a Nominated Neighbour and to help protect them from unwanted doorstep callers.



GOOD NEIGHBOURS STOP ROGUE TRADERS!

Are you a good neighbour? Do you want to protect vulnerable residents from rogue traders?

Signs an unwanted doorstep caller is visiting a neighbour:

- Traders have been cold calling in the area
- A builder's van is parked nearby, particularly one that doesn't include a company name or contact details
- Building or maintenance work on your neighbour's garden or house starts unexpectedly
- Poor quality work is visible on the roof, driveway, or property
- Your neighbour appears anxious or distressed
- Your neighbour visits the bank, building society, or post office more frequently, particularly if they are accompanied by a trader

What can I do?

- ✓ Ask your neighbour in private - in person or on the phone - if things are OK
- ✓ If they are displeased, suggest calling a relative or carer on their behalf
- ✓ Note any vehicle registration numbers
- ✓ Keep hold of any flyers you have received through your door
- ✓ Ask if the trader has left any paperwork and put it in a clean food bag
- ✓ If you suspect a crime, call the Citizens Advice consumer helpline on 03454 04 05 06 or your local trading standards office
- ✓ If the situation with the trader becomes volatile, call the police

For more information, contact your local trading standards service or Citizens Advice Bureau or visit www.tradingstandards.gov.uk/ncwinfo

#stoproguetraders



What does a Nominated Neighbour do?

- ◆ Makes communities safer for vulnerable residents by agreeing to be the first point of contact for any doorstep callers.
- ◆ Provides a phone number or address where they can be reached during the day on a Nominated Neighbour card so their neighbour never has to open their door to a doorstep caller.
- ◆ Checks the identity of any doorstep callers referred to the Nominated Neighbour by the vulnerable resident.
- ◆ Calls the Citizens Advice consumer service helpline on: **03454 04 05 06** if they suspect that their neighbour is a victim of doorstep crime.

How do I find a Nominated Neighbour?

- ◆ Arrange with a trusted neighbour, nearby family member, neighbourhood watch coordinator, or parish councillor to be a Nominated Neighbour.
- ◆ Ask the Nominated Neighbour to check the identity of any unrecognised home callers.
- ◆ Hand them your Nominated Neighbour card and ask them to fill in an address or phone number where they can generally be reached during the day.

How do I obtain a Nominated Neighbour card?

You can contact Croydon Trading Standards for a Doorstep Crime advice pack – the pack includes instructions on how to be a nominated neighbour, how to use the card and the card itself.

You can download further information on the scheme as well as other doorstep crime prevention advice, door-stickers etc. via:

www.croydon.gov.uk/advice/tstandards/doorstep-crime/rogue-trading

Call 0208 407 1311 or email trading.standards@croydon.gov.uk



The Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008

WARNING

We do not deal with invited traders

PLEASE LEAVE AND DO NOT RETURN

Failure to do so is a criminal offence

CROYDON www.croydon.gov.uk  

Electric Blankets & Small Electrical Appliances Testing

Croydon Trading Standards carried out safety testing on electric blankets and small electrical appliances in Croydon, over two days. The testing took place on 9 October at the Selsdon Centre for the Retired, located within Sainsbury's, Selsdon, and on Friday 10th October 2014 at the Parchmore Community Centre, Thornton Heath.

The event was a great success. A total of 112 items were tested over the two days. Items tested included: heated rollers, hoovers, kettles, irons, toasters, and a sewing machine. Of the 112 items tested, 73 were electric blankets and 39 were other electrical appliances

The overall failure rate for blankets was 52%. The overall failure rate for electrical appliances was 59%. However, the safety tester was able to carry out some minor repairs, such as changing plugs or replacing fuses, to reduce the failure rate of small electrical appliances tested to 23%.

Many of the failures were due to the age of the blanket. Several blankets were found to be 30 to 40 years old with no built in safety features, all of these being potentially lethal.

Of the electric blankets tested this year, 1 was over 40 years old, 4 electric blankets were over 30 years old, 7 were over 20 years old, 2 were over 13 years old, and 3 were over 12 years old.

All modern blankets incorporate an Overheat Protection safety device that should disconnect the electrical supply in the event of a fault. The message to the public is 'Make sure that you get your electric blanket checked regularly'.

Safety experts advise that electric blankets have a ten year life span and should be replaced thereafter. It is also recommended that electric blankets are checked on a regular basis by the manufacturer or specialist Test Company such as the one used at Croydon's recent safety testing event.

Every person submitting an item for testing was given a specially tailored crime prevention pack by Trading standards which included Scams booklet, door sticker and cheque book stickers, information bulletin, and a 'Know Your Rights!' quiz. Trading Standards hope to secure funding, to run the event again next year.



Photograph of wires and control units cut off from failed electric blankets

Safeguarding the Vulnerable Community

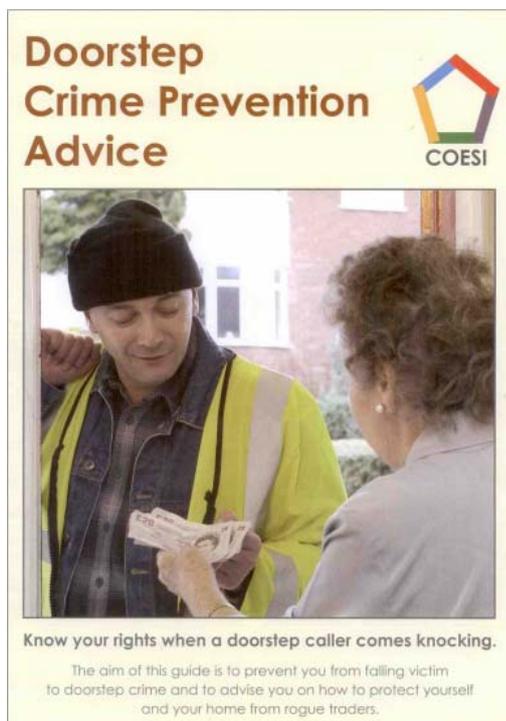
Vulnerable residents are being offered a specially tailored pack offering guidance on a range of issues, including how to deal with unwanted cold-callers and rogue traders.

Croydon's Trading Standards team has been working with national charity Centre of Excellence for Sensory Impairment (COESI) to make an existing information pack accessible to people suffering a sensory impairment, such as deafness or a sight deficiency.

The popular doorstep crime information pack is one of the most oft-requested and distributed information packs offered by the trading standards department. It contains information on knowing your rights when an unwanted cold caller comes knocking; the popular doorstep sticker informing cold-callers that business is not conducted at the front door; and how to find a trusted tradesman. It also lists council services designed to make the lives of elderly or vulnerable residents easier, such as the handyman service (for the carrying out of minor works and odd jobs at low cost), and Careline (offering a 24-hour emergency alarm for those living independently).

The adapted pack is now available in the following formats:

- Braille
- Audio
- Large print
- British sign language
- Video with voice-over and sign language



Trading standards recognised the importance of reaching out to those most vulnerable in society who may be targeted by rogue traders. Working with COESI, who managed to successfully secure a grant from the Big Lottery Awards-for-All fund to finance the project, the team has made the pack accessible for the hard-of-hearing and sight-impaired.

A lot of research went into the project, which saw the team working with local charities Croydon Hearing Resource Centre and Croydon Voluntary Association for the Blind, and speaking to focus groups to ensure the end product would meet the needs of the target audience. Armed with this pack, we believe the more vulnerable in society will be well equipped to protect themselves and their homes from rogue traders. For more information, contact us on 020 8407 1311.

The downloadable print version and the video can be viewed at

www.coesi.org.uk/Home-Doorstep-Crime-Prevention.aspx

To order the pack, in whichever format you require, call COESI on 0800 612 9508

WE NEED YOU!



We are continually receiving intelligence from other parts of the country about rogue traders, so your information can help us to identify if a rogue has reared their head in Croydon.

Your information could help us apprehend them before someone gets ripped off!

With this in mind please report all cold-calling to us on 020 8407 1311 or email: trading.standards@croydon.gov.uk

Stay safe this autumn!

Scamsmart

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) has launched a national campaign 'Scamsmart' to warn people about investment fraud and how to spot a potential scam. A massive 1.2 billion is lost to investment fraud in the UK every year with victims losing on average £20,000 each.



The fraudsters use a number of tactics to get their victim to invest in products which don't exist for example land-banking schemes, carbon credits and rare earth metals.

Don't be fooled

The FCA believes that those most at risk of investment fraud are people in retirement who are actively seeking to get a good return on their savings. If anyone does fall victim to an investment fraud, it is vital they report to Action Fraud to give law enforcement the best chance of tracking down those responsible and dismantling their criminal operations".

Key signs that it might be an investment fraud:

- You are contacted unexpectedly about an investment opportunity through a cold call, email, or a follow up call after receiving a promotional brochure out of the blue
- You are pressured to invest in a time-limited offer, for example a bonus or discount is promised if you invest before a set date
- The risks to your money are downplayed, for example you are told that you will own assets you can sell yourself if the investment doesn't work as expected, legal jargon is used to suggest the investment is very safe
- The returns sound too good to be true, for example, better interest rates than those offered elsewhere
- You are called repeatedly and kept on the phone for a long time
- You are told that the offer is only available for a limited time or to a limited group of people

For further information visit the FCA's Scamsmart website: www.scamsmart.fca.org.uk

To report a fraud and receive a police crime reference number, call Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040 or use the online fraud reporting tool: www.actionfraud.police.uk/report_fraud

Was this bulletin helpful?

Contact Trading Standards to request a free door sticker advising cold callers that they are not welcome. If you are a victim of scam mail, contact us to receive a free copy of our toolkit on how to avoid falling victim and how to stop the letters.

Additionally, please let us know what you think of this bulletin and what Trading Standards topics you would like to see covered in future editions.

Contact Trading Standards:

Tel: 020 8407 1311

Email: trading.standards@croydon.gov.uk

Citizens Advice Consumer Service:

Tel: 03454 04 05 06

Web: www.citizensadvice.org.uk