

# Advice and Guidance Doorstep Crime



## **Introduction**

The purpose of this leaflet is to provide advice regarding doorstep crime and can offer you:

- An understanding of what doorstep crime is.
- The ways to identify if a trader is not genuine.
- The steps you can take to prevent yourself becoming a victim.
- What to do if you think you may be a victim of doorstep crime.

## **What is doorstep crime?**

Doorstep Crime covers a range of activities but is generally broken down into two different categories, Rogue Traders and Distraction Burglaries.

Rogue Traders, often known as cowboy builders, typically cold call at their victim's home and use various pressure tactics to sell home improvement services. The services they provide, such as roofing work, gardening work or driveway repairs are often unnecessary, of poor quality and vastly overpriced.

In some instances the criminal will provide a cheap quote to entice their victim to agree to the work before increasing the price once it is complete and subjecting the victim to intimidation to make them pay.

Other types of Rogue Traders include those who cold call at their victim's door offering to sell goods such as "fresh" fish, mattresses or household cleaning products. The goods they sell are often misdescribed, of poor quality and are vastly overpriced. Some traders are known to research homes as potential targets for distraction burglaries.



Distraction burglaries are the more sinister types of doorstep crime. In these instances the criminals trick their victim into letting them into their home. They often disguise themselves as Council staff, care workers or utility company representatives and use a cover story in order to gain their victim's trust.

Typically working in groups of two or more, the criminals will distract the victim and then carry out a fast and tidy search of the property, stealing any cash and valuable items they can find before leaving. The victim will often

not know they have been burgled until they realise the items are missing which may be days or weeks later.

## **Who is most at risk?**

Anyone can become a victim of doorstep crime, but statistics show that criminals target the most vulnerable members of society such as the elderly as they are more likely to agree to their scam.

The average age of victims is 81 years old and they are likely to be living alone with little or no visitors. The most worrying statistic is that 63% of victims are repeat targets as the criminals return or provide their details to others.

## **How can I identify if a trader is not a genuine?**

Genuine traders will not have time to cold call customers and don't have to pressure someone into agreeing to work on their doorstep. They will provide a written quote and give the householder time to get other quotes and consider their options before employing them.

By law traders are required to give a **written fourteen day cancellation notice** for contracts over £42 concluded at a consumer's home. The documentation provided should include the trader's name and contact details. The majority of doorstep criminals do not mention a cooling off period as they want to carry out the work immediately and make off with the money before anyone else gets involved.

If documentation is provided by criminals it is often poor quality and does not contain necessary information such

as company names, numbers and addresses. In the majority of cases there will only be an untraceable mobile telephone number for contact purposes.

## **What can I do to protect myself from Doorstep Crime?**

There are various steps you can take to prevent yourself from becoming a victim of doorstep crime – some of these are discussed below.

- Display a 'No Cold Calling' window sticker in your home. Free stickers are available at most public libraries or from the Civic Centre on Victoria Road, Hartlepool.
- **NEVER** buy goods or services from someone who cold calls you. Do not let them pressure you into buying something from them.
- Keep your front and back doors locked at all times.
- Only answer the door to people you know or are expecting and use a door chain when someone you do not know knocks on your door. If in doubt, **KEEP THEM OUT!**
- Do not feel you are being rude by not answering the door or saying 'no'. Your own safety is always more important.



- Do not keep items such as handbags, wallets and keys near the front door.
- Do not let strangers into your home, even if they are asking you for help. Distraction Burglars will try anything to trick you.
- Never keep large amounts of cash in your home. Always keep your money in the bank as burglars are aware of the places money is usually stored at home.
- Book a Crime Prevention Visit. The Hartlepool Community Safety Team provides free Crime Prevention Visits and can assist with home security including door chains - you can find their telephone number on the back of this leaflet.

- You can apply to make your road a 'No Cold Calling Zone' (NCCZ). A NCCZ is a specific location which wards off uninvited callers from that area. Applications can be requested by calling Trading Standards – you can find their telephone number on the back of this leaflet.
- If you are concerned about a cold call, contact Trading Standards. It's better to be safe than sorry.

## **What should I do if I believe I may be a victim doorstep crime?**

If you believe that you may be a victim of doorstep crime it is important you act quickly.

- Tell a friend or family member, it is important to remember that you are a victim of a sophisticated crime and you are not alone. Don't feel embarrassed or disheartened as it could happen to anyone.
- Report it to the authorities. Cleveland Police and Trading Standards take doorstep crime very seriously and your intervention may prevent further residents falling victim to the criminals. If you believe the criminal is going to return to your home imminently, call 999.
- If you have provided a cheque or bank details, inform the bank immediately as by acting fast you may prevent your money from being taken from your account.

The Consumer Protection from Unfair  
Trading Regulations 2008

**WARNING**

This is a

**No Cold  
Calling Zone**

Uninvited callers  
please leave and  
**DO NOT RETURN**

Failure to do so is a  
**CRIMINAL OFFENCE**



## Useful Telephone Numbers

Police – Emergency: 999

Non Emergency: 101

Hartlepool Trading Standards: 01429 523362

Hartlepool Community Safety Team: 01429 523100

Victim Care and Advice: 0303 0401099

Citizens Advice Bureau: 01429 408401