

Cambridgeshire Crimestoppers Tackling Crime on Your Doorstep

The independent crime-fighting charity Crimestoppers is reminding the residents across Cambridgeshire to be aware of doorstep crime during the long days of summer and autumn and to report any suspicious activity. Doorstep criminals typically employ a number of ruses to gain the confidence of victims before defrauding or stealing from them. They will also target the more vulnerable members of our communities.

Between May 2014 and April 2015 there were over 500 instances of suspected rogue trading reported to Cambridgeshire Police.

The most common types of doorstep criminals are those more commonly known as a 'rogue traders'. These criminals masquerade as genuine businesses and set out to deliberately overcharge for unsatisfactory goods or services.

Typical services preferred by rogue traders are driveway maintenance, pressure-washing, gardening, roofing and guttering.

Rogue traders rarely offer the statutory 14 day cooling off period applicable for work costing more than £42, often insist on large amounts of cash up front and can be intimidating. Once they have found a victim they often return in the future under a new guise.

Another group of **doorstep criminals** are those who trick their way into victims' houses with the intention of stealing any valuables they can find within. These 'distraction burglars' often pose as workmen who ask to check something in the house and whilst left alone they, or an accomplice, will look for something easy to steal, such as cash, a handbag or jewellery. Among the most common of the excuses offered are needed to check the water supply and searching for a lost pet or ball.

How to deal with unexpected and unwanted visitors on your doorstep

Remember the following 4 principles:

LOCK: Ensure you keep exterior doors and windows locked.

STOP: Before you answer the door, stop and think whether you are expecting anyone.

CHAIN: Put the door bar or chain on. Look through the spyhole or the window to see who it is. Always keep the bar or chain on while you are talking to the person on the doorstep.

CHECK: Ask for and carefully check the caller's ID card as all genuine callers will always carry one. If they do not have an ID card then **do not let them in**

Doorstep callers are adept at high pressure sales techniques. They will catch you unawares. They are polite, persistent and persuasive and they will rush you to make a decision. Say "No thank you" and then immediately close the door. **Always get three quotes from recommended traders** before you go ahead with home maintenance work.

There are few better crime prevention measures than having **good neighbours**. If you live close to an elderly or vulnerable person you can volunteer to be a Nominated Neighbour. This is an informal Trading Standards scheme whereby if a vulnerable person receives an unexpected caller they can immediately direct them to a trusted neighbour. Details as to how to set up a scheme can be found at www.tradingstandards.gov.uk/ncwinfo.

Good neighbours can also assist with **reporting any suspicious activity** in the local community and this is where **Crimestoppers** can assist as it allows the public to report crime or suspicious activity completely anonymously any time of the day or night.

Cambridgeshire Crimestoppers are keen to gather information to enable the police and Trading Standards to investigate and prevent doorstep crime.

Local Chairperson Lisa Oddystates: “Doorstep crime victimises the most vulnerable members of the community and we want to put a stop to it in Cambridgeshire. If you know of anyone undertaking such activity or have seen suspicious persons or vehicles in your neighbourhood please let us know, completely anonymously, so together we can tackle this criminality.”

If you have any information about crime or criminals, please call Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111. No one will ever know who you are. Individuals can also pass on information anonymously via the Crimestoppers website at www.crimestoppers-uk.org.