

Wiltshire's Operation Liberal Initiative Spring 2010

Welcome to the first edition of Wiltshire's Operation Liberal newsletter focusing on door step traders and distraction burglars



Robert Floyd, High Sheriff of Wiltshire, and Karen Harrold, Chair of the Wiltshire Criminal Justice Board, with Andy Fee, Pippa McVeigh and Sue Wilkin

Local Criminal Justice Awards

Detective Constable Andy Fee was presented with the Caring for Victims Award on 26 February 2010 for his commitment to Operation Liberal and establishing closer links with partners to help the fight against rogue traders and distraction burglars. Due mainly to his and his team's hard work, recorded distraction offences between 2007/2008, across Wiltshire have been significantly reduced.

The Wiltshire Local Justice Awards formally recognise the people behind the scenes who have exceeded normal duties in order to deliver an effective service within Wiltshire and Swindon.

What are rogue traders and distraction burglars?

Rogue Traders are people who knock on doors offering to do household maintenance such as gardening, roofing or gutters. These rogues will quote a reasonable price which is then greatly inflated and the work done is often poor.

Stealing from vulnerable people is a rogue traders 'profession' and their 'earnings' can be vast.

Rogue Traders look for:

- ◆ any clue which suggests the householder struggles with maintenance
- ◆ untidy gardens
- ◆ disability hand rails by front doors
- ◆ faded curtains
- ◆ bereavement notices on church notice boards and in newspapers.

Rogue Traders will rarely produce formal paper work or quotes in writing. They usually come from outside of the area with no fixed address so they cannot be tracked down easily.

The fight to reduce doorstep crime is an on-going battle and relies on the help of people who work or volunteer in the community.

Victims of these offences often say they feel foolish and confused and therefore do not report the crime. People who do not report these crimes often become repeat victims.

Distraction burglary is a type of burglary where the 'method of entry' is by deception rather than by force or sneaking in.

Rogue traders can:

- ◆ initially appear friendly
- ◆ appear to offer a useful service at what seems a reasonable price
- ◆ become pushy and aggressive if the householder is hesitant
- ◆ often start the job before being given permission
- ◆ demand payment immediately on completion of job
- ◆ often increase the total bill
- ◆ offer to accompany the client to their bank or building society to withdraw cash.

In Westbury, one woman was accompanied three times to her bank. The rogue trader had realised that she was suffering from dementia and therefore unable to remember clearly whether she had paid him.

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Front line staff have been trained to look out for suspicious traders

What is Operation Liberal and who is involved?

Recent prosecutions

In 2008, Wiltshire Council's Trading Standards obtained the UK's first Enforcement Order for breaches of Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations.

The order was obtained after an elderly couple in Salisbury were taken to the bank by the offender, who demanded almost £3,000 for some minor gardening and poor quality brickwork pointing.

The Order made in Salisbury County Court requires the offender to give consumers notice of their cancellation rights; to carry out work to a satisfactory standard and requires them not to mislead consumers by making false statements and not to be aggressive when dealing with consumers.

Cooling off laws

Since October 2008 householders who agree to and sign contracts in their home have extra protection.

The right to 'cool off' or back out of a contract agreed in the home must be notified to the householder by the trader in writing. Failure to do this is an offence and has proved to be a useful tool in the fight against doorstep crime as most rogues do not comply.

Wiltshire Trading Standards Officers have used the legislation on a number of occasions to have individuals suspected of doorstep crime arrested for failure to give the notice. Arrest then enables the police and Trading Standards to fully explore the activities of the individuals concerned.

Countering the crooks seminar



Wiltshire Council, Swindon Borough Council and Wiltshire Police organised a seminar for the financial community in Devizes on 9 May 2009.

The aim of the seminar was to highlight to banks and building societies, their importance in trying to combat rogue traders by looking out for suspicious withdrawals by elderly people, especially

if they are accompanied by someone who does not appear to be family or a friend.

Following the seminar several financial organisations signed up to the Wiltshire and Swindon Banks and Building Societies Protocol, indicating how their organisation could participate.

Trickster and Scambuster

Swindon Borough Council's Trading Standards have been running Senior Wellbeing Days in Swindon since 2007.



Trickster and Scambuster have been performed during the events to help people recognise the different methods and scams that rogue traders and distraction

burglars use. After the show the audience is encouraged to discuss these despicable offences.

Over 400 people in the Borough of Swindon have seen the performances and organisations like Wiltshire Police, Bobby Van, Wiltshire Fire and Rescue, Parkinson's Society, Affected By Cancer (ABC) and many more have been invited to attend so that they can share advice and information.

Trickster and Scambuster performances are produced by Solomon Theatre.

Suspicious withdrawals

How can financial staff help?

Staff can tactfully:

- ◆ ask why the cash is needed
- ◆ point out the dangers of carrying large amounts of cash
- ◆ discourage the customer from drawing out cash
- ◆ tell them about other ways of paying.

If staff feel that the person may be a victim they can:

- ◆ ask them if they would like the police or trading standards to be called
- ◆ try to ensure that the customer and anyone with them are caught on CCTV
- ◆ try to identify the vehicle that the customer arrived in.

National Operation Liberal has been looking at ways to help all police forces in the fight against distraction burglary, whilst also raising public awareness.

As a part of the public awareness campaign, four new posters, funded by the Energy Retail Association, have been produced and are available for every police force in the UK.



Itinerant gangs

Partnership working with the Police has resulted in a number of successful arrests of rogue traders.

A trio of men from the Midlands were arrested and interviewed in relation to an incident where they had removed gutters from an elderly woman's home and then demanded £8,500 to "repair and replace" them. Police and Trading Standards intervened, preventing payment.

Due to excellent cross boundary working, Solihull Trading Standards, which had previous knowledge of this group, was able to obtain an Enterprise Act Undertaking to comply with the law.

The Enterprise Act improves consumer protection by giving enforcers (including Trading Standards) strengthened powers to obtain court orders against traders that breach a range of consumer legislation.

It is important that any householder who is pestered by cold callers, or has been victimised by a rogue trader reports it to **Consumer Direct on 08454 04 05 06**.

Consumer Direct is an important source of data for Trading Standards and enables them to identify not only where problems exist, but also the current trends in doorstep crime.

Wiltshire's Bobby Van Trust

Anyone who is unfortunate enough to be a victim of a break-in or distraction burglary in Wiltshire and Swindon, especially if they are over 60 years old, will be referred to **Wiltshire's Bobby Van Trust**.

Once a referral has been made, the Trust will always make an appointment to visit the home, they will never cold call.

During 2009/10 to date, Wiltshire's Bobby Van Trust in Wiltshire and Swindon has visited 75 homes which were targeted by distraction burglars and three homes which had bogus callers.

Officers are able to give advice regarding the incident and most importantly how to prevent being re-victimised. They provide not only practical help, for instance installing door chains and viewers, but also to give the elderly person real reassurance that not only are they being taken seriously but that there are people around who will help them.

Bobby Van officers are all Home Office qualified crime reduction officers and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue trained fire risk assessors. They are also all skilled carpenters and lock fitters.



The Trust was set up in 1998; it is a registered charity and completely responsible for raising its own funds. The service is free for older, vulnerable and disadvantaged people.

The Trust is often asked to attend societies and groups to give talks mainly to older people about how they can increase their safety and prevent distraction burglary. An example of a recent talk was to Kennet Valley 60+ group which 34 elderly members attended.

Testimonials for the Bobby Van Trust include:

"Thank you for your patient, skilled and excellent work in securing my home before Christmas. I am deeply grateful for the time you spent and for the provision of all necessary equipment which is being put to good use."



Bobby operators, Alan Weston, Rod Law and Mick Leighfield

"As I wrote to the Wiltshire Constabulary, my doctor was highly impressed by the level of care given by the Bobby Van Trust to elderly, infirm and vulnerable citizens of our county."

No Cold Calling Zones

The 'No Cold Calling Zones' initiative is a nationally recognised scheme designed to reduce the number of uninvited doorstep callers in residential areas, as well as provide information and support to enable householders to deal effectively with any doorstep caller.

There are 14 zones in Wiltshire and seven in Swindon, at present, supported by both Wiltshire Police and Trading Standards.

A national survey has shown that whilst the zones do not prevent every cold caller they do substantially reduce the numbers. Residents in the Wiltshire zones reported feeling more confident in dealing with callers and justified in sending them away.

How is a zone set up?

Not all areas are suitable for a zone to be set up.

Before a zone can be agreed:

- ◆ statistics on door step crime are considered for the area
- ◆ Parish Councils, any neighbourhood watch scheme and residents are consulted.

If the scheme goes ahead:

- ◆ residents are notified and provided with information packs and contact numbers
- ◆ street signs are placed in the zone
- ◆ local Police are informed.

Operation Liberal

was formed in October 1998 with six member police forces together with the support of the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the National Crime Squad to tackle the offence of distraction burglary.

The operation has grown over eight years into a national database of distraction burglary intelligence and crimes with a co-ordinated centre based at Leicestershire Police HQ.

In Wiltshire, Operation Liberal is supported by the Operation Liberal Working Group which includes Wiltshire Police, Wiltshire and Swindon Trading Standards, representatives from Wiltshire Council's Safer Communities Team, Wiltshire Bobby Van Trust, Age Concern, Wiltshire Farm Foods, housing providers and utilities companies.

The work of the group is to examine the wider issues of doorstep crime and to work towards reducing that crime. The group has an on-going programme of education initiatives and crime reduction measures.

Contact us:

For information on Operation Liberal contact:
Wiltshire Trading Standards
01225 713248
Swindon Trading Standards
01793 466272
Wiltshire Police
0845 4087000 and ask for Operation Liberal

For information regarding this newsletter contact:
Jacqueline Jasper
Safer Communities
Wiltshire Council
01225 776773

Training for Wiltshire Council staff

Wiltshire Council and Wiltshire Police have introduced training for staff who come into contact with elderly or vulnerable people to help protect them from 'bogus caller' crimes.

To date the training has been delivered to parish stewards and domiciliary carers with plans to roll out to other front line staff within the partnership.

The training aims to:

- ◆ raise awareness of doorstep crime and the various forms this can take
- ◆ gives officers examples of what to look out for and what action they can take
- ◆ includes a DVD with clips from elderly people who have been victims.

If our staff can be alert and informed, older and vulnerable people are better protected, our intelligence is improved and we have a better chance of reducing the number of vulnerable victims

Following the training to the parish stewards, a number of calls have been made to Trading Standards regarding suspicious activity within the area.

Training sessions can be designed to suit the needs of any group or organisation. If you would like to arrange training please contact Sue Wilkin at Wiltshire Trading Standards who will be able to discuss your staff's needs and requirements.



Sue Wilkin and Pippa McVeigh with Shane Hall, Parish Steward for Warminster

Exchange of best practice

On 18 December 2009 Wiltshire Council hosted a training seminar to exchange ideas and share best practice on how to deal with rogue traders.

Oxfordshire Trading Standards gave an insight into how they operate a specialist response unit which deals exclusively with rogue trader incidents as well as consumer and trader education.

Wiltshire Council highlighted their successful training sessions for front line staff.

Literature available to order

Scam Wise door stickers are available for individuals. There is a charge for large orders.

Two examples of door stickers and literature. The left one is a red 'No Doorstep Traders' sticker with a list of prohibited actions: 'No home repairs or improvements', 'No free advice or surveys', 'No calls without appointment', and 'No I.D. No Entry'. The right one is a white 'SCAM WISE' sticker with the text 'Stay out stranger. Always check who's at the door. IF you're not sure, DON'T OPEN THE DOOR. Expecting a caller? Door chain on & check I.D.' and 'Say NO to doorstep traders and keep the door locked'. It also includes a warning: 'You can ask them to leave - if they don't it's a CRIMINAL OFFENCE - Dial 999' and contact information for Consumer Direct.

contact Wiltshire Trading Standards on **01225 713248** or email tradingstandards@wiltshire.gov.uk
Or
Swindon Trading Standards on 01793 466272 or tstandards@swindon.gov.uk