

WatchOut

Community safety news for Suffolk

Checkatrade.com
Where reputation matters

July 2015



Kevin Byrne - Checkatrade boss wants to protect the elderly from rogue traders

Kevin sends warning to the elderly

By Peter Faulkner

THE man behind Britain's fastest growing tradesmen's directory is issuing a tough warning to all elderly and vulnerable residents in Suffolk to make sure their lives are not put in danger.

All across the country people are employing unskilled and unqualified plumbers and heating engineers to repair and instal boilers, radiators and fit new pipework.

Kevin Byrne, CEO at Checkatrade, fears they will be putting their lives at risk and these fears are backed by the Gas Safety Register who demand that tradesmen installing gas appliances and fittings must be Gas Safe registered.

Using rogue fitters to fit or repair boilers is life-threatening because residents could be at risk from carbon monoxide poisoning

Checkatrade is now sending a warning to all elderly residents in the County asking them to take every safeguard to ensure that the tradesman they employ is Gas Safe registered and not a rogue fitter.

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“Every gas fitter who takes out membership with us is Gas Safe registered otherwise we will not allow them to be part of our organisation,” said Mr Byrne.

“We also expect them to act honourably and professionally and if not they will be taken off our books.”

“That said, there are some basic safeguards every elderly resident should take if they are thinking about employing a gas fitter for a new boiler, for central heating or for having new radiators fitted.

“Firstly don't take the engineer's word for it that he is Gas Safe. Ask to see his Gas Safe registration card, all registered Gas engineers will carry this on them, if they don't have it, don't use them.

“Their card will show their registration number and you can check it online at www.gassaferegister.co.uk or by phoning the Gas Safe Register on 0800 408 5500.

Or if you have a mobile phone you can simply text Gas then their registration number to 85080. You will receive a text message back advising if the registration number is registered.”

“Just spending an extra couple of minutes to be sure could save you thousands and may even save your life,” added Mr Byrne.

“We have hundreds of gas engineers and plumbers on our books covering Suffolk and surrounding areas and we expect them not only to uphold the name of Gas Safe, but also ensure that they maintain the reputation that Checkatrade has built up.

“Consumers can also check on our website on a member's profile page whether their Gas Safe membership is current or not.”

A Gas Safe Register survey found that one in six people admitted they would knowingly employ an illegal gas fitter if they came recommended.

The cost to employ a gas engineer is also more important to homeowners than safety,



Bone fide Gas Safe fitters will always show you their identity card

with more than two in five people (41 per cent) wrongly assuming that illegal gas fitters are cheaper than registered engineers.

The survey also claims that an estimated quarter of a million illegal gas jobs are carried out every year, and Gas Safe Register's ongoing investigations are uncovering that nine in 10 illegal gas jobs are not completed to the required standard.

In fact, one in five jobs are so dangerous that Gas Safe Register has had to act quickly to switch the appliance off because it could have immediately caused a gas explosion, fire or carbon monoxide poisoning.

“These statistics confirm the importance of

making sure you employ the right person and that person is legally qualified to work in your home,” added Mr Byrne.

“Gas is a killer, but so too is a cowboy fitter – for your own health and safety be alert and be vigilant

.”My business specialises in screening and monitoring trades and service providers, ensuring that consumers not only get the best service possible, but that they get them from reputable companies.

“Our slogan is 'where reputation matters', and I see Checkatrade - which is a free service - as a vehicle to stop 'rogue tradesman preying on customers.”

Crackdown on cyber crooks

POLICE in Norfolk and Suffolk are getting tougher on cyber criminals who use the internet to commit fraud and other crimes.

A new joint Norfolk and Suffolk Cyber Crime Unit has been launched and will be based in Halesworth. It aims to combat the rising number of cyber and cyber enabled crime.

The unit will be responsible for investigating all offences where networked computers or technology have been used to commit crimes, from child pornography, human trafficking, drugs and contraband and the increasing problem of online fraud.

Nationally on-line fraud is on the increase. In 2014 there were 3,815 fraud and Cyber reports in Norfolk and 3,102 in Suffolk; however, it's believed 80 per cent of all cyber-crimes and fraud is preventable.

Now, to coincide with the launch of the new Cyber-Crime Unit, Norfolk and Suffolk Police have released a series of short films to warn

the public about the dangers of on-line fraud and how to prevent it.

The films #TooGoodToBeTrue show three scenarios involving investment fraud, lottery fraud and online shopping fraud with the underlying message that if an offer looks too good to be true, it probably is.

Detective Superintendent Steve Mattin from the Norfolk and Suffolk Cyber and Serious Crime Directorate said: “The digital revolution is now a way of normal life, in which we communicate, conduct business and make transactions and therefore the same should apply in the way we police it.

“Cyber-crime should be viewed in the same way as those crimes that affect our communities and neighbourhoods. How often do we give advice to the public about how to stay safe in their neighbourhoods along the lines of 'lock your doors' and 'keep your valuables hidden'. With so many of our communities

doing business online, we need to be giving similar advice.

“The launch of the new Unit ensures that officers are committed to identifying these types of crime and taking positive steps to disrupt online criminals and fraudsters.

“Just as importantly, the launch of the video will ensure that people living in Norfolk and Suffolk are aware of the dangers out there in cyber space. Anyone can become a victim of on-line fraud, regardless of age, gender, profession or background.

“People need to recognise the many types of cyber-crime, how it can affect them and how to protect themselves from it, as well as know how to report it.

“The films send out a clear message, that if an offer looks too good to be true, it probably is.

To report on-line fraud or for more information contact Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040.

Dodgy traders seen selling goods from back of a van



SUFFOLK Trading Standards has received reports of traders selling generators and pressure washers, televisions, mattresses, chain saws and jewellery from the back of their van!

They appear to be moving around the County and have so far been reported in Sudbury, Long Melford, Clare and Whepstead.

Trading Standards suspects the TVs to be broken, the jewellery cheap and fake, and the chain-saws don't bear thinking about!

Please be especially cautious of any individual who approaches you and offers to sell you something at an incredibly reduced price.

Trust your instincts – if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is!

Anyone who is offered goods for sale out the back of a van, by a person who approaches them in the street, or uninvited at the doorstep, should be highly suspicious.

Goods sold in this way may be stolen, counterfeit, unsafe or simply overpriced.

If you are approached, please contact Trading Standards on 03454 040506, call Suffolk Police on 101, or Citizens Advice consumer helpline on 03454 04 05 06.

Splashing stuff by PC Neil - and it is all in aid of Ipswich hospice

THE annual 'Bobby on a Bike' fund-raising event, run by Suffolk Constabulary dog handler PC Neil Smith MBE, should be reaching its climax as you read this.

But instead of a bike ride for charity, this year the team are taking to the water for 'three twelve hour days of paddling down the Thames in a full size 40-foot dragon boat.

From June 22-24 a crew of 14 paddlers, two on the helm and a drummer, will be paddling 126 miles of the Thames, from Lechlade in Wiltshire to Teddington in London, a challenge never undertaken before.

The journey will involve the negotiation of 45 locks and will see the team travel through Oxford, Reading and Windsor.

The crew are a combination of police officers, police staff and others from outside the constabulary, with the two on the helm both senior teachers from the Royal Hospital School (RHS) at Holbrook.

The two RHS teachers have been supporting the crew at regular training sessions at Alton Water and fund-raising to date has taken the form of a rock night, supermarket bag pack, cake sale and charity golf day,

with over £3000 raised so far for St Elizabeth Hospice.

Bobby on a Bike was established in 2002 and raises funds for local and national charitable causes.

Neil said: "We are attempting something that we have never done before, by taking to water rather than cycling. Training started last August and we have dealt with every weather condition you could think of.

"The idea came about after some of us took part in the St Elizabeth Hospice Dragon Boat Day last year, where teams race against each other in ten man boats, culminating in a final race with the fastest two teams.

"During the races, my head began to tick over ideas, as it does...and from those crazy thoughts, this event was born.

"The chosen charity for the challenge is St Elizabeth Hospice in Ipswich and so far just under £3,000 has been donated on the BT Mydonate page, which is amazing..

"We're all anxious and nervous about the challenge ahead – especially as no one else has attempted it, but we're excited and looking forward to completing the event and handing over the money to this fantastic charity."



Friends of the Hospice on a previous charity bike ride

Sign up and ring the changes

DO you know someone who has fallen victim of a telephone scam and suffered financial detriment from it?

The effect of scam calls on vulnerable members of the community is a major problem across the UK, but one that is grossly under reported.

The impact suffered by the victims is not just financial, but emotional

To help protect vulnerable Suffolk residents from telephone scams in the future, Suffolk County Council is seeking victims to come forward and take part in a national call blocking technology trial.

The new 'TrueCall' technology operates in a small device installed on a telephone line that blocks all unwanted calls.

TrueCall has the ability to remember who residents like to speak to and who they don't.

Phone numbers of family and friends are stored separately, whilst the details of nuisance callers are kept on another permanently blocked list.

Residents, carers and family members can decide how calls are handled, for example there is an option for callers to be asked to identify themselves before ringing.

If you would like to register for further information, contact Chris Woods at Suffolk County Council's Community Safety Team on 01473 260 816 or by email at chris.woods@suffolk.gov.uk.

Whilst this trial is currently only available for previous scam victims that have suffered financial detriment, information about how to protect yourself and friends against scams is available at www.tradingstandards.gov.uk/advice/ or by calling 08454 04 05 06.

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July campaign to beat the fraudsters and scammers

NEXT month residents in Suffolk get the chance to find out how scammers and fraudsters operate - and how they can be beaten

July is Scams Awareness Month and Suffolk, like the rest of the country, will be promoting their campaign Don't be Rushed Don't be Hushed.

Each year millions of people in the UK fall prey to scammers. Some frontline scam fighters estimate the total cost to consumers of mass-marketed scams could be as much as £5 billion.

The truth is – with reporting levels as low as 5 per cent for some types of scams – we don't really know.

Talking in hundreds, thousands, millions even billions of pounds undervalues the true cost of scams: the blight they bring to lonely lives, the emotional trauma for families, the widespread loss of confidence among consumers.

Sometimes the impact is ruinous: a lifetime of careful planning and saving wiped clean in the space of a telephone conversation, at the stroke of a pen, in the click of a mouse. Some scams may seem by comparison trivial, the losses low-impact.

But try telling that to a family living on a breadline budget being stung for charges on non-existent loans by unscrupulous credit brokers, or a mum or dad looking for birthday presents online only to end up empty



handed and out of pocket.

Don't be Rushed Don't Be Hushed Scams Awareness Month 2015 (SAM15) is about consumers getting together with the help of their representative organisations including the Citizens Advice service and trading standards services.

Activities Scams Awareness Month gives consumer campaigners the opportunity to revisit the issue over the course of four weeks.

This year it will be divided into four key channels:

- telephone scams (week 1 launch Thursday July 2)
- online scams (week 2 beginning Monday July 13)
- mail scams (week 3 beginning Monday July 20)
- doorstep scams (week 4 beginning July 28).

Advice on catalytic converter thefts

OFFICERS in Mid Suffolk held a free catalytic converter marking session to help reduce further crime in the County.

The event took place on June 13 at Barley Green Garage on Laxfield Road.

Members of the public attended during the day to get their catalytic converters marked free of charge by officers to reduce the chances of becoming a victim.

Vehicle owners can also follow these tips:

Keep private vehicles in a well-secured garage where possible, and if no garage is available, in a

well-lit public area.

Park vehicles in such a way as to make access to the catalytic converter difficult, or parallel with another vehicle if you own one.

Keep commercial vehicles in a locked building or compound.

Use alarms, lighting and CCTV to deter thieves. Further marking sessions will be organised in the future.

For more details please contact your local Crime Reduction Officer by calling 101.

Take advice on your pension

PENSIONERS are being warned about the rise of scams targeting their savings following Pension Freedom Day.

The Association of British Insurers (ABI) and The Pensions Advisory Services (TPAS) have launched a social media campaign alerting people to the dangers of cold callers offering a pension review.

April's changes give people more freedom over what to do with their pension pot and the scammers are taking advantage of confusion surrounding the new options.

To help you cut through the confusion and avoid the scammers, here are a few tips.

1. Be wary of cold callers

It pays to be suspicious if anyone calls you to offer you a money-making deal. Always ask to call them back. Reputable companies will always be happy to let you do this, whereas scammers tend to be more wary about giving contact details. Any pension review should be conducted by a regulated financial adviser and very few of these make cold calls.

2. Check out the company

Check the Financial Conduct Authority's register of regulated financial services providers. This will tell you if the company is registered as well as listing any companies being investigated.

3. Recognise fraudsters' behaviour

Telephone fraudsters often describe their offer as a 'legal loophole' or a 'once-in-a-lifetime opportunity'. Typically, they will try and send couriers to your home address within a day of calling you. This type of behaviour should set alarm bells ringing.

4. Know the facts

Many telephone scammers claim to be able to provide immediate access to your pension or a tax-free lump sum worth more than 25% of your pension fund. The truth is that accessing your pension savings before age 55 is only allowed in special circumstances, such as severe ill health.

5. If in doubt, contact an expert

The Pensions Advisory Service has urged all consumers who are suspicious about any pension-related offers to call on 0300 123 1047.