

Crime prevention advice

Preventing Doorstep Crime

Doorstep crime is the name given to crimes carried out by bogus callers and rogue traders who call uninvited at people's homes under the guise of legitimate business or trade.

This can be a particularly distressing type of crime because the perpetrator may have directly deceived you in getting into your home or extracting money from you. Victims are often older or vulnerable people, and may be left feeling betrayed, foolish and very distressed.

Understanding rogue traders

Rogue doorstep traders will use a trade as a means to extract large sums of money from people.

Common services they may offer include driveway re-surfacing, block paving, roofing, guttering, gardening or selling goods such as furniture, alarms or mobility aids. They may claim you have a loose roof tile or say a tree in your garden is unsafe and needs to be trimmed.

They will often give a very low quote that will increase when work begins. Sometimes they will drive victims to the bank and will often come back on future occasions to get more money.

Distraction burglars

Distraction burglars or bogus callers are criminals who call at a house with the intention of tricking their way inside to steal money and/or other valuables.

They may be smartly dressed and claim to be from the water board, the council, the police, health organisations or charities.

Methods they may use to get inside your home can include saying they need to turn off the water because of a leak, use the phone because their car has broken down, or perhaps say they have lost a pet.

In an emergency call **999**
For non emergencies call **101**



www.northants.police.uk



Northamptonshire Police

Fighting crime, protecting people

The caller may be a man, a woman or even a child and they will use any story they can to try and gain access to the property.

The most common type of distraction burglary is the water board method. This is where someone tells you there is a burst main nearby and they need to check your sink. Whilst you are distracted, they steal goods before escaping. These people can seem very genuine and may even look the part with a fluorescent jacket. Passwords can be set up with utility companies to help prevent this type of crime from happening.

“If you’re not sure, don’t open the door”

This is our motto. If you don’t know who is at the door, and you haven’t asked them to visit, do not answer the door. If you do choose to open the door, double check your back door is locked first. Distraction burglars have been known to work in pairs. While the caller is engaging in conversation with you at the front, someone else goes around the back of the property to obtain goods from within the house before leaving. It’s often some hours before you realise what has happened.

How you can help

Our Doorstep crime Action Network (DAN) brings together members of the public, private, public, charity, and community sector organisations. If you have any suspicions or concerns that distraction burglars or rogue doorstep traders are operating in your community or targeting someone you know, contact our dedicated doorstep crime hotline on 0345 23 07 702.

We are asking anyone who has contact with an elderly or vulnerable person to pass on the gentle crime prevention reminders detailed in this guide. Help protect the people you care for from falling victim to doorstep crime.

Protecting someone you care for

Every day in Northamptonshire, people are at risk of falling victim to doorstep crime. Most of the victims are elderly or vulnerable. Whether you are caring for a family member, working as a professional in community care or safety, or just keeping an eye out for a neighbour, you may be the only person that has regular contact with them and can play a vital role in preventing them from becoming a victim:

- Make the person aware that they are never required to open their door to unexpected callers and that it’s not rude to send someone away
- Reinforce the message “If you’re not sure, don’t open the door”
- Explain the tactics used by rogue doorstep traders and distraction burglars
- Encourage the person to set up passwords with their utility companies
- Try to ensure that the outside of the property is well maintained, including the garden. Properties that are poorly maintained may be targeted

- Advise the person not to keep money in the house and to keep credit cards, debit cards, cheque books, savings books and other valuables in a safe place
- Display a 'No Cold Calling' sticker to discourage unwanted callers
- If you know the person requires some work to be carried out, help them to select a reputable trader by directing them to organisations such as their local Home Improvement Agency, Care and Repair or the Trading Standards 'Buy With Confidence' scheme
- Reinforce this advice on a regular basis and always ask if anything unusual has happened or whether anyone has called at the property uninvited. We need more people on the look-out, so if anything has happened please report it using the 101 number

Protecting yourself

- Make sure you can see who is at the door before you answer it. Where possible fit a spy-hole to identify callers. Alternatively talk to them through an adjacent windows
- Don't feel pressured into opening the door. Don't feel you are being rude, genuine callers won't mind
- Remember that sadly not everyone is who they say they are, or may have ulterior motives, especially if they knock at your door to point out a supposed problem, such as damage to your roof
- Don't let people you don't know into your home, even if they say they need help. If more than one person is at the door, one may try to keep you talking while the other slips away to see what they can steal
- Set up passwords with your utility companies, genuine callers will need to recite this password to you. Always ask to see an ID card too
- Don't use telephone numbers on ID cards, if the person isn't genuine the ID and the telephone number won't be either. Obtain telephone numbers direct from the phone directory. Alternatively make a list of your important numbers and keep them near the phone
- If you're still not sure that a caller is who they say they are, turn them away. Legitimate companies and callers will not mind
- It's always worth having a trusted neighbour on call. A genuine caller will not mind being challenged and will be happy to talk with anyone. They will also not mind coming back if you are feeling in any way uncomfortable and will happily pre-arrange an appointment
- Display a 'No Cold Callers' sticker on your door or in your window
- Contact the Northamptonshire Police crime prevention team if you'd like to talk to someone about protecting yourself against doorstep crime

Remember: If you're not sure, don't open the door.

Who to call

If a crime is in progress or you feel imminently threatened dial **999**.

Report suspicious callers to the doorstep crime team on **0345 23 07 702**.

For non-urgent enquiries or to report any concerns or suspicions call **101**.

Doorstep security measures

If you're concerned about doorstep crime, the following security measures can help provide reassurance.

- **Door spyhole.** Fitted in a solid door, this allows you to see who's calling without having to open the door
- **Door curtain.** Half-glazed doors can make you feel exposed, but fitting a curtain or tinted window film will provide screening
- **Door chains.** These prevent the door being opened fully, but are only as good as their fixings – small screws can be easily pulled out
- **Door mirror.** Fitted to the side of the door and used with a door chain, this allows you to talk to someone at the door without fully opening it
- **Digital door viewer.** Recording either on movement or when the doorbell is pressed, and showing the images on a small screen inside the door, this allows you to see who is calling without opening it
- **A wireless door phone** allows you to talk to a caller without opening the door
- **Memo minder.** Motion-activated, this unit allows you to record a message which plays when you walk past it, such as a reminder to not open the door or to use your door chain
- **Key safe.** Criminals know all the obvious places to look for hidden keys. A key safe enables family or carers to access your home, and gives you a secure spare key. Always mount them out of sight, and talk to your insurer before you fit one
- **Doorstep crime Action Network or No Cold Callers stickers.** Usually double sided, these notify cold callers they will be reported to the police, with an internal message reminding the occupant how to protect themselves

Protecting your details

Removing your details from sales lists can help you avoid unsolicited sales calls, reducing unexpected callers and junk mail. Find out how to do this in our 'Protecting your personal details' guide. If you'd like further advice about preventing doorstep crime email our crime prevention team on crimeprevention@northants.pnn.police.uk