

## Shopping safely this Black Friday

PCC Mark Shelford and Avon and Somerset Police are warning local people to take extra care when shopping online in the run up to Christmas.

According to Action Fraud, over 28,000 people across the country reported falling victim to online shopping fraud with losses totalling £15.4million. Of this number, 4,489 people reported being conned out of their money during the Black Friday and Cyber Monday sales.

One common tactic used to defraud victims is the use of fake websites that are purporting to be reputable companies; these websites are created to look identical to the real website they are imitating and will advertise items at a much cheaper price than retail price to entice the victims. In reality, these websites are fake and the victim will never receive the item they have paid for.

There are numerous ways online shoppers can protect themselves:

- Choose where you shop – If you are making a purchase from a website or person you do not know, carry out some research first. Be sure to look at online reviews of the website or person you are buying from.
- Payment method – Use a payment method that offers protection such as a credit card. Most major credit card providers will help you get your money back if the item is faulty, damaged or never arrives. Ensure there is a padlock icon in the browser address bar before paying.
- Staying secure online - Use a strong separate password for your email account. Criminals can use your email to access other online accounts such as those you use for online shopping.
- Watch out for phishing emails or texts - Some of the emails or texts you receive about online offers might contain links to fake websites. If you are unsure, do not click on the link and visit the website directly instead. If you receive an email you're unsure about, you can report it by forwarding the email to the Suspicious Email Reporting Service at [report@phishing.gov.uk](mailto:report@phishing.gov.uk)

Action fraud also advises that the public:

- Stop – Take a moment to stop and think before parting with your money or information
- Challenge – It's okay to reject, refuse or ignore any requests
- Protect – If you've been a victim of fraud, contact your bank immediately and report it to Action Fraud online at [actionfraud.police.uk](http://actionfraud.police.uk) or by calling 0300 123 2040

PCC Mark Shelford, Association of Police and Crime Commissioner's national lead for Economic Cyber Crime, said: "Shopping online has become the norm, especially in the light of the pandemic, and we need to ensure criminals do not take advantage of this new shopping habit. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is and we must all remember to stop, think and protect yourself before parting with your money.

"Please take the time to read the advice from Action Fraud so you can shop online safely and enjoy the festive period."

Avon and Somerset Fraud Protect Officers Amy Horrionbin and Jordan Coates added: "Protect your precious pounds this Christmas, prevent the fraudsters from benefitting and buy goods safely online. In the run up to Christmas, online shopping fraud naturally increases as we see more individuals using the internet to purchase items through the Black Friday and Cyber Monday deals.

"Not only do reports increase but the overall loss to the victim increases as people spend more for the Christmas period. Online shopping fraud affects all ages but most commonly those aged 20 – 49 years of age. Avon and Somerset Police would advise people to be extra cautious when

considering purchasing items online such as concert tickets, phones, gaming devices and designer goods.

“Fraudsters will take advantage of lower stock levels of such items and we see consumers searching wider for these items, often falling victim to fraudulent websites or buy/sell platforms.”