

Know the signs of doorstep crime

Always be on your guard when anyone you are not expecting – a man, a woman or even a child – turns up at your door.

Burglars and fraudsters will not go to the trouble of breaking in if they can just knock and be invited in.

Not sure? Do not open the door!

The following advice may help you to identify a bogus caller at your door and can help you take the right steps to ensure you and your property stay safe.

- Distraction burglars target vulnerable, often elderly people in their homes. Sometimes they pose as officials from utility companies or other organisations or make up stories to get into your home and steal from you. These criminals can be men, women or even children. Their appearance can be smart, casual or they may even wear tabards and have fake identification.

Genuine callers will normally make an appointment first and will carry identification with their photograph on it.

- Bogus 'dealers' may offer to buy your antiques, furniture or jewellery, at what seems to be a good price. Chances are they're trying to trick you into selling something for a lot less than it is worth.
- Bogus 'workmen' and 'so-called rogue traders' may say they need to come in to make urgent repairs. Again, they really want to steal from your house. You also need to be careful of callers who offer to make building repairs or tarmac your drive. Often they will ask for money in advance; they may even offer to drive you to the bank to withdraw money to pay them.
- Traders must give you 'Notice of Right to Cancel, which gives you a 14-day cooling off period before work starts, for any work over the value of £35.

What can you do?

- If you are not sure who is at your door, do not open it or let anyone into your home.
- Always put the chain on before you open the door. However, only put on your door chain as you answer the door – do not keep it on all the time as this could delay your exit in the case of fire.
- Check the identity of the caller by calling the company they claim to be from. Use the numbers listed in the phone book or on a bill. Do not use any phone numbers provided by the caller – they may be bogus.
- Genuine callers won't mind making an appointment for a date when you can have someone with you. This gives you time to check their identity too. Remember, if the caller refuses to give details or does not show what you believe is a genuine ID card, do not let them in and call the police straight away on **999**.

- Call a neighbour or friend nearby to come along and check out the visitor. Many service providers provide password schemes and it can be helpful to sign up to these. When unannounced callers knock at your door they should know the password if they are genuine.
- Keep doors locked and windows secure at all times.
- If somebody asks for your help, needs to make a phone call, claims to have lost a ball in your garden, needs a drink or pen and paper, don't invite them into your house. If you really want to offer help, make them wait outside and while you're away from your door, close and lock it. Remember: it is your doorstep, your decision.
- Never use companies who make unsolicited calls, don't provide written contracts or who offer to do work for cash.
- Where possible, have a safety chain, intercom or video doorbell/viewer fitted and always attach the chain/use the intercom or viewer before opening the door to strangers.
- Check whether traders are members of the [Local Authority Assured Trader scheme](#) or the government [Trust Mark scheme](#).

Immediate danger

If an unexpected caller makes you feel alarmed or intimidated, call **999** immediately.

Door to door charity collections

People collecting money for charity may call at your door. The Charity Commission recommends collectors should:

- have a valid, local authority or police licence.
- wear an ID badge (be wary of any ID that looks altered, photocopied or home-made).
- have a sealed collection container with the charity's registration number and name on it – this should match the details on their ID badge.
- be able to prove they have the charity's permission to collect.
- remember – if you do not feel sure about the collector, say no and close the door. You can make a donation directly to the charity or a different charity of your choice.

If you have any concerns about a charity collector, call the Charity Commission Helpline on **0300 066 9197**.

Pedlars

A pedlar is someone who travels and trades on foot, going from town to town or house to house selling goods such as pictures and household goods or offering their skills in handicrafts.

A pedlar must hold a certificate granted by a chief constable. The certificate is valid for one year and applies throughout the United Kingdom. Certificates cannot be issued to people under the age of 17.

The certificate does not cover a person to sell food or drink, flowers, medicines, poisons, gunpowder or tobacco – all are prohibited items. Any person wishing to sell foodstuffs must make application to the local authority for licences to comply with food safety regulations.

An application form for a Pedlar's Certificate must be obtained and completed by the applicant at any Police Station, so a description can be obtained for security reasons. The completion of the application has to be witnessed by a member of police staff.

Application and fees

When applying for a pedlar's certificate the applicant will need to bring two forms of ID. One of these must show the applicant's name, date of birth and photograph (ideally a passport or driver's licence). The other must include their address to show they have lived within the Avon and Somerset force area for the last 28 days.

A fee of £12.25 is payable and all forms go through the Licensing Bureau for vetting and a final decision will be made by the licensing manager.

Applicants will be notified of the decision in writing.

Someone who acts as a pedlar without a certificate commits an offence.

Further support

- [Age UK website](#) – A federation of independent organisations working with older people offering advice and support services to help them feel safe.
- [Actionfraud website](#).
- [Trading Standards](#).