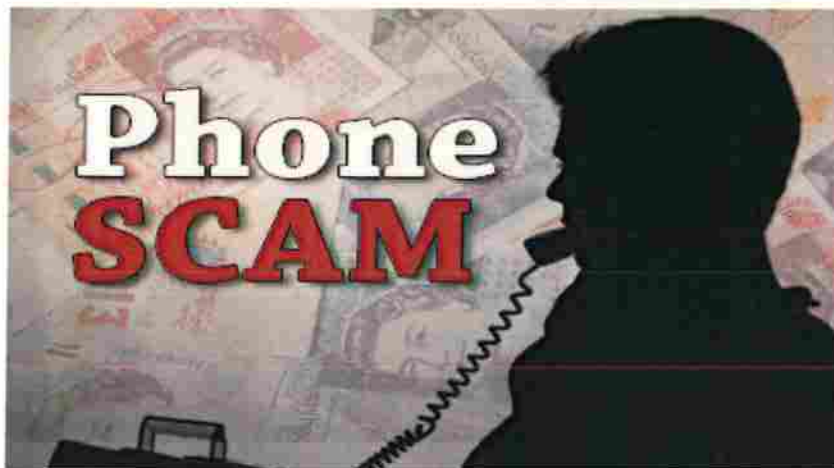




Latest news from Redcar & Cleveland Council's STOP COLD CALLING TEAM



CRIME IN THE HOME ALERT

HARD LUCK STORIES

Beware of callers who turn up at your door with a tale which makes you feel sorry for them. These criminals are either after your money or are assessing the opportunity to gain access to the home to steal cash and valuables.

Examples of hard luck stories include:

- They've run out of petrol and need some cash to buy more
- Their car has broken down and they need money for a taxi
- They need money to access training to get a job
- They have an emergency situation and they need to use your phone

However, convincing the story, don't hand over cash, give your bank details out or let someone you don't know into your home.

PROMOTIONAL OFFERS

Often associated with home improvement work this is one amongst an array of tools used by rogue traders to get you to agree to work.

You may be quoted a few hundred pounds for a job as a special price but once the work commences further work is identified by the trader at a much higher cost. At this point it may be difficult to

decline the work, for example, your roof may be open and exposed to the elements.

Rogue traders who use this technique will leave you out of pocket with work that is unsatisfactory and not even necessary in the first place.

HELP FOR VICTIMS OF FRAUD

Victim Care and Advice Service (VCAS) is part of local charity Safer Communities and provides support to victims of crime and anti-social behaviour. Redcar & Cleveland Trading Standards and VCAS work together to ensure that victims of doorstep crime and other scams receive practical and emotional support.

Support includes the provision of one to one scam awareness sessions and equipment such as video ring doorbells, motion activated sound players and crime prevention kit.

VCAS are always interested in meeting local groups and organisations. Recently Sarah from VCAS attended an event at Community Stepping Stones in Dormanstown to talk about the support VCAS provides, distribute No Cold Calling Home packs and offer safety advice with the local Crime Prevention Officer.

VCAS also hold regular Safe & Well drop in sessions at Morrisons in Redcar on the first Thursday of every month in and outside of the Community Room.



NOT WELCOME



TICKET FRAUD



Are you considering buying tickets for the 2024 Paris Olympics, Paralympic Games or other big events this summer?

Last year more than 8,700 people reported they had been a victim ticket fraud, with a total of £6.7 million lost. This works out to an average loss of £772 per victim.

Action Fraud offer the following advice:

- Only buy tickets from the venue's box office, the promoter, an official agent, or a well-known and reputable ticket exchange site.
- Avoid paying for tickets by bank transfer, especially if buying from someone unknown. Credit card or payment services such as PayPal give you a better chance of recovering the money if you become a victim of fraud.
- The password you use for your email account, as well as any other accounts you use to purchase tickets, should be different from all your other passwords. Use three random words to create a strong and memorable password and enable 2-step verification.
- Be wary of unsolicited emails, texts or adverts offering unbelievably good deals on tickets.
- Is the vendor a member of Society of Ticket Agents and Retailers (STAR)? If they are, the company has signed up to their strict governing standards. STAR also offers an approved Alternative Dispute Resolution service to help customers with outstanding

- complaints. For more information read the Ticket Buying guide at www.star.org.uk.

Fraudsters often create fake ticket retail companies and send out emails offering the chance to buy tickets for popular events. If you receive a suspicious email report it to report@phishing.gov.uk

ONLINE TICKET TOUTS JAILED FOR FRAUD

Ticket touters who shamelessly exploited people longing to see their music idols in concert have been sentenced to a combined total of 6 years and 5 months imprisonment at Leeds Crown Court.

Husband and wife duo, Maria Chenery-Woods and Mark Woods, along with Maria's sister Lynda Chenery and Lynda's former husband, Paul Douglas, ran TQ tickets, a multi-million-pound limited company.

The defendants used TQ tickets to purchase and resell hundreds of tickets at hugely inflated prices for events and concerts such as Ed Sheeran, Lady Gaga, Gary Barlow, Liam Gallagher, Strictly Come Dancing, Paul Weller and Little Mix.

The sentences handed down on 17th May 2024 are as follows:

- Maria Chenery-Woods (54) of Dickleburgh, Norfolk – 4 years imprisonment and disqualified from being a company director for 10 years.
- Mark Woods (60) of Dickleburgh, Norfolk – 2 years imprisonment, suspended for 2 years. Disqualified from being a company director for 4 years. To undertake 250 hours of unpaid work and was made the subject of an electronic curfew for 4 months between the hours of 8pm and 6am.
- Lynda Chenery (51) of Dickleburgh, Norfolk – 1 month imprisonment, suspended for 2 years. Disqualified from being a company director for 3 years. To undertake 180 hours of unpaid work and complete 20 days of rehabilitation.
- Paul Douglas (56) of Pulham Market, Norfolk – 2 years 5 months imprisonment, and disqualified from being a company director for 6 years.

Mark Woods and Lynda Chenery were found guilty of fraudulent trading on 13 March 2024. Maria



Chenery-Woods and Paul Douglas entered guilty pleas earlier in the process.

An investigation by the National Trading Standards eCrime team found that the defendants used multiple deceitful and fraudulent tactics to acquire multiple tickets from reputable sellers including Ticketmaster, Eventim, SEE Tickets and ACS.

They used fake identities to resell the tickets at significantly higher prices – up to 500% above the original cost - on secondary ticketing sites such as Viagogo, Seatwave, Stubhub and Getmein.

The defendants were also involved in 'spec selling' - where non-existent tickets are sold to consumers at inflated prices. When they couldn't fulfil the purchases, the defendants tried to cover it up by providing fake postal trackers and sending empty or torn envelopes to make it appear as if the tickets had been sent and lost in the post.

Lord Michael Bichard, Chair of National Trading Standards, said:

"Having spent hard earned money on tickets for highly anticipated live events, too many people discover too late that they've been the victim of a scam, turning excitement into distress.

"Today's sentencing marks another significant milestone in our work to combat online ticket touts, which has already resulted in landmark prosecutions, and sends a clear message that criminals trying to rip off honest fans risk prosecution.

"I would like to thank the National Trading Standards eCrime team for their tireless efforts to bring the defendants to justice and urge anyone concerned that a sale may be fraudulent to report it to the Citizens Advice consumer helpline by calling 0808 223 1133."

The eCrime team offer the following advice when purchasing tickets **online**:

- Buy your tickets from, or check ticket availability with, an official agent or reputable ticket supplier (the primary ticket sites) – if in doubt, check the festival or event website for more

information about the official vendor and for terms and conditions regarding the re-selling of tickets.

- Avoid buying from secondary ticket sellers or buying tickets on social media – you could be refused entry if you buy unofficially. However, we know fans desperate for tickets may look for tickets from unofficial sellers. If engaging with unofficial sellers **always**:
 - research the seller/company
 - check companies are registered at Companies House (the longer the better - if they recently registered it could be a scam)
 - check the seller or company online for unfavourable reviews on Site Jabber, Trust Pilot or Feefo and beware of false positive reviews, a favourite tactic of scammers
 - check ticketing forums for unfavourable feedback – again beware of false positive reviews
 - check the terms and conditions regarding the re-selling of tickets
- If buying from secondary ticketing sites check the following information is available:
 - the seat number, standing area or location of the ticket
 - who the seller is
 - if the seller is connected to the platform or event organisers
 - restrictions on resold tickets that may prevent entry to the event
- When purchasing tickets online you should:
 - pay by credit card and never by money transfer
 - use an encrypted payment method
 - don't post pictures of genuine tickets online (they could be copied and your tickets may become useless)

Report suspected fraudulent ticket sales to the Citizens Advice consumer helpline by calling 0808 223 1133.



SCAM ALERT

GIFT CARD SCAMS

A new scam has arrived in the UK!

The scam known as 'card draining' occurs when money loaded onto gift cards is stolen.

Criminals steal gift cards from shops, scratch away the silver foil that covers the validation code and make a note of the numbers.

They then replace the silver foil with strips purchased online or simply glue the card back onto the packaging.

They will regularly check to see if money has been loaded onto the card in the hope of draining the funds before the card is used by the consumer.

How to protect yourself:

If possible, buy from behind the counter in store.

Check for physical signs of tampering – is the protective cover over the pin intact? Is the packaging sealed?

Check the balance and use cards quickly to reduce the risk of money being stolen before you use it.

Be wary of other gift card scams including:

You are asked to pay a fee up front for a prize or lottery win. The fee is paid using a gift card, but you do not receive any prize or cash win.

A 'friend' asks you to buy a gift card as a present for a family member as they are unable to do it themselves. As soon as you send the code for the card, they steal the money.

You are asked to pay an outstanding fine or tax bill using a gift card by someone impersonating a government official.

A person with whom you have developed an online relationship requests money by way of gift cards.

WHATSAPP GROUP CHAT FRAUD

Action Fraud are warning WhatsApp group chat members to be on guard against fraudsters.

The national reporting centre for fraud and cybercrime had received 636 reports by the beginning of May from people who had been targeted.

The fraudster will audio call a member of the group claiming to be another member of the group. They will often use a false profile picture and/or display name so it appears to be a genuine member of the group.

The victim is told that they will receive a one-time passcode which will allow them to join a video call for group members. They are told to share this passcode so that they can be registered for the video call.

In fact, the fraudster is asking for a registration code to register the victim's WhatsApp account to a new device so they can take over the account.

Two step verification is then enabled by the fraudster so that it is impossible for the victim to regain access to their account.

The fraudster will then contact other members of the group or friends and family from the contacts list and ask for money as due to an emergency situation they are desperate for money.

If you have been a victim of fraud or cybercrime report it to www.actionfraud.police.uk or by calling 0300 123 2040

To protect yourself when using WhatsApp:

- **Set up two-step verification**
- **If someone makes a request for money or something out of the ordinary call them outside of WhatsApp to confirm their identity**
- **Report spam messages or block a sender within WhatsApp**



NEW LAWS FOR SELLERS OF SMART GADGETS

Increasingly our homes include a variety of different smart devices including games consoles, fridges, video doorbells, TV's, thermostats and baby monitors. They can connect with each other and other systems via the internet offering us convenience and significant time savings by being able to operate them remotely using one device, typically a smartphone



Statistics indicate that 99% of UK adults own at least one smart device.

UK households own an average of 9 smart devices.

However, anything that connects to the internet is vulnerable to being hacked which puts your sensitive information and home security at risk.

New Regulations introduced on 29th April 2024 place obligations on manufacturers to protect consumers from hackers and cyber criminals when using internet connected smart devices.

Legal requirements include:

1. Manufacturers will be banned from using weak default passwords that are easily guessable by hackers, for example 12345. If there is a common password the user will be promoted to change it on start-up.
2. Manufacturers will have to publish contact details so issues and bugs can be reported.
3. Manufacturers and retailers will have to be transparent as to the minimum time a user can expect to receive important security updates.

The Office for Product Safety and Standards, (OPPS), is responsible for ensuring compliance with the legislation.

Consumers can report suspected non-compliance to OPPS by email: OPSS.enquiries@businessandtrade.gov.uk or contact the helpdesk on 0121 345 1201

Guidance on smart devices and security is available from the National Cyber Security Centre at www.nscs.gov.uk/smart

ENERGY THEFT

Energy theft occurs when a meter is bypassed, (where a pipe or device is used to divert gas or electricity, so it does not pass through the meter) and also when a meter is manipulated to alter or avoid accurate measurement of consumption.

Meter tampering can result in injuries and death.

Student households are particularly at risk. Unscrupulous landlords charge a monthly fixed rate, but the meter is manipulated to show a lower reading than the actual consumption.

Energy theft can be reported by calling 0800 023 2777 or anonymously online at <https://www.stayenergysafe.co.uk>

Stay Energy Safe provide the following advice:

Signs of Energy Theft to Spot on your Electricity or Gas Meter:

- Numbers not visible
- Numbers running backwards
- Numbers not moving
- Loose wires or unusual wiring
- Burn or scorch marks on the meter casing
- Sparks coming from the meter or wiring
- Crackling or hissing noises around the meter
- Wires that don't lead back to the fuse board or trip switch panel



- Pipes that have been bypassed, or look out of place, or the use of rubber tubing
- The smell of gas around the meter
- Signs of overheating such as smoke, burning smells and leaking bitumen

Signs of Energy Theft to Spot in your Home:

- Sparks from multiple sockets and switches
- Electric shocks from multiple appliances
- Electric shocks from taps, the bath or shower
- Meters locked away
- Smell of gas
- A prepayment meter that doesn't need topping up
- Gas flames that are bigger than you would expect
- If you are a landlord, you should be suspicious if your tenants won't give you access to the meters
- If you are a tenant, you might be suspicious if your landlord charges you a fixed or very low amount for bills

RENEWABLE ENERGY & HOME SECURITY MEASURES



BUSINESSMAN CONVICTED OF FRAUD AND MIS-SELLING

Elderly & vulnerable consumers conned out of £1.5 million.

In an investigation lead by National Trading Standards and supported by Derbyshire County Council Trading Standards, company director Robin McDonald was found guilty of conspiracy to commit fraud by false representation along with charges of fraudulent trading.

Through the business Sunpower Renewables Ltd, McDonald, carried out fraudulent activities activities and mis-sold solar panels, air source heat pumps, and thermo-dynamic water heating systems to consumers.

Representatives from the companies used aggressive practices to secure contracts including staying in consumers' home for hours to secure work that consumers did not need at inflated prices.

The work carried out by the businesses was unsatisfactory and claims about energy savings did not materialise. Consumers who complained were ignored by the company.

Stirling Technologies Ltd trading as Proshield supplied Passive Infra-Red (PIR) detectors, window and door sensors, emergency medical buttons/pendants, smoke detectors and carbon monoxide monitors. These home security measures were marketed as being linked to a system that would guarantee a response from emergency services in the event of it being triggered. This claim proved to be false.

McDonald will be sentenced later this year along with Roy Hancher of Wolverhampton who pleaded guilty to fraudulent trading and Nicola Mather of Derby who pleaded guilty to money laundering.

Guidance on buying green heating products and insulation products is available from the Competition & Markets Authority at www.gov.uk/government/publications/buying-green-heating-and-insulation-products

Information and advice on home security can be found at www.which.co.uk/reviews/burglar-alarms-and-smart-security-systems and www.cleveland.police.uk/cp/crime-prevention/protect-home-crime



TRADING STANDARDS NEWS

PREMISES CLOSURES - ILLEGAL CIGARETTES AND VAPES

Officers from Redcar & Cleveland Trading Standards are continuing in their efforts to disrupt the sale of illegal cigarettes, tobacco products and vapes within the borough.

As part of this work – closure orders and extensions have been applied for by Trading Standards and granted by Teesside Magistrates Court.

On 11th January 2024, a closure order for three months was issued against LA European Mini Market of 15 Ennis Square, Dormanstown after illegal tobacco products and nicotine inhaling products (vapes) were found during an inspection by officers accompanied by a tobacco detection dog and handler.

The vapes exceeded the tank capacity permitted by UK legislation and the tobacco products were counterfeit.

The inspection took place after Trading Standards received complaints about the sale of counterfeit tobacco, including to children along with allegations about the sale of vapes to children.

An extension of the closure order for a further three months for the same premises was subsequently granted by magistrates on 10th April 2024.

In Redcar, a three month closure order also obtained in January 2024, for 170 High Street, was extended for three months by magistrates.

WARNING: POTENTIALLY FATAL BLACK MARKET VAPES

Of great concern are illegal vapes that contain substances such as spice, (a collection of synthetic cannabinoid Class B drugs) and nitazenes, (a collection of synthetic opioid Class A drugs that are between 50 and 500 times stronger than heroin and have led to the death of adults both locally and nationally).

These vapes are being targeted at youngsters and pose an imminent threat to life.

A number of children, including some from the South Tees Public Health area, have needed urgent medical attention after using illicit products laced with illegal drugs.

In a message to parents and carers of children and young people in Redcar & Cleveland, Mark Adams, Joint Director of Public Health, Public Health South Tees and Clare Mahoney, Assistant Director, Education & Skills, Redcar & Cleveland Council advise:

- that the legal age for purchase and use of nicotine inhaling products is 18 and that young people who do not smoke should not start vaping.
- If a young person does use vapes, make sure that these are regulated/licensed vapes bought from a reputable retailer, discuss the following dangers with your young person and encourage them to engage with the stop vaping service.
- If your young person uses a refillable vape or you are concerned they are at risk, please:
 - familiarise yourself with information **SPICE** and **NITAZENE** on the Drug Wise website: www.drugwise.org.uk
 - have a chat with your young person following helpful suggestions in the **GUIDE** at www.re-solv.org/help-for-adults/support-for-parents
 - encourage your young person to access the relevant local support services.

The trade in illegal tobacco and vapes is linked to both low level and large-scale organised crime.

You can report illegal vapes and tobacco products to Trading Standards by contacting the Citizens Advice consumer service by calling 0808 223 1133.

You can report illegal tobacco anonymously at www.keep-it-out.co.uk/anonymours-reporting



E-BIKE & E-SCOOTER SAFETY

In January 2024, the Office for Product Safety and Standards, (OPSS), issued withdrawal notices to distributors requiring that a lithium-ion battery for E-bikes be removed from sale.

The Product is an **UPP Battery (Unit Pack Power), Model number U004 & U004-1, Battery type 18650 (U004) & 21700 (U004-1), Country of origin being China.**

The product does not meet the requirements of the General Product Safety Regulations 2005 as it presents a serious risk of fire.

Owners are advised to stop using the battery immediately and dispose of it safely via their local household waste disposal site.

OPSS offers the following advice when purchasing, using or charging your e-bike or e-scooter to reduce fire risks:

- Step 1: **RESEARCH** – only BUY an e-bike, e-scooter, charger or battery from a known seller and check any product reviews
- Step 2: **READ** – always READ and FOLLOW the manufacturer's instructions for charging and using e-bikes or e-scooters
- Step 3: **CHECK** – not all e-bike or e-scooter batteries and chargers are compatible or safe when used together. Check and only USE the manufacturer's recommended battery or charger
- Step 4: **CHARGE** – always charge in a safe place without blocking exits and always UNPLUG your charger when you have finished charging
- Step 5: **NEVER** – attempt to modify or tamper with your battery

London Fire Brigade recently reported that the majority of fires related to e-bikes and e-scooters have happened in homes and that in 2023 they have been called to, on average, an e-bike or e-scooter fire once every two days.

Information on how to spot the warning signs that your battery is a fire hazard and how to keep your home safe when charging your e-

bike and e-scooter is available at www.fireengland.uk/fire-safety/charging-your-e-bike-or-e-scooter

UNIT PRICING – MAKE YOUR MONEY GO FURTHER

Earlier this year the Competition & Markets Authority (CMA) launched a short guide about unit pricing and how consumers can use it to identify the best value grocery items instore and online.

Unit pricing is a labelling system that allows you to compare the prices of groceries and choose the best value product.

Unit prices show how much products would cost if they were sold in packs of the same weight or volume. The unit price is usually found beneath the total packet price listed on a shelf-label, or when the item is listed online, for example, 20p per 100 ml, which allows you to compare and find the best price out of more than one size of the same product.

The guide, "Unit Pricing: Information for Consumers" is available on the CMA website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/competition-and-markets-authority>

POULTRY REGISTRATION

All poultry keepers, regardless of the size of their flock will be legally required to register their birds and review their entry on the register annually to ensure details are up to date.

The new requirements come into force in Autumn 2024. However, poultry keepers in England and Wales are encouraged to register their birds ahead of the deadline of 1st October 2024.

The national register will help manage disease outbreaks, such as avian flu and allow communication with all poultry keepers in order to safeguard the health of birds.

Further information is available at www.gov.uk/government/nes/new-measures-to-help-protect-poultry-industry-from-bird-flu and www.gov.uk/government/publications/poultry-including-game-birds-registration-rules-and-forms



Buying a used car?

Check the car's history before buying

Doing some simple checks will reduce your chances of buying a car that's being sold illegally or has had major repairs.

- Check the car's details with the DVLA
- Check the MOT history on GOV.UK
- Get a private history check
- Inspect the car and take a test drive
- If you're still not sure - get an independent report

Find out more at
citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer

#ShopAware

**citizens
advice**

ctsi Chartered Trading
Standards Institute

**NATIONAL
TRADING
STANDARDS**
Protecting Consumers
Safeguarding Businesses

Department for
Business & Trade



PROTECTING YOUR VEHICLE FROM CRIMINALS



Advice from Crime Prevention Cleveland Police

Modern vehicles have built in security features including an engine immobiliser which makes it much harder for vehicles to be stolen.

Criminals know that to drive away a modern vehicle they need the ignition key.

Burglaries where houses are targeted purely to steal car keys or indeed to transport items stolen from the house in the householder's car occur.

In order to protect vehicles, the following steps should be taken:

- **Maintain good levels of security around the house.**
- **Keep doors and windows locked (over 30% of house burglaries occur during the day through unlocked doors and windows).**
- **Do not leave vehicle keys where they can be seen from outside the premises or through the letter box. Keep them safe.**
- **Get into the habit of taking wallets or purses together with the mobile phones and car keys upstairs at night.**

Remember

- **Keep keys safe at all times – especially overnight!**
- **Keep doors and windows locked and secure.**

In order to reduce the opportunities of thefts of and from motor vehicles please consider the following advice:

1. Keep vehicles in a garage where possible when parked at home.
2. When parking vehicles in a public area always try and park in a busy, well-lit area which is overlooked by buildings. When using a public car park, look for one displaying the Park Mark Safer Parking signs. These have been reviewed by the police to ensure they are as safe as possible.
3. Always lock and alarm/immobilise vehicles even if it is unattended for only a moment, it takes a thief seconds to commit a crime. If the vehicle does not have an alarm/immobiliser, consider fitting a Thatcham alarm system. Never leave vehicles unattended and unlocked.
4. Consider having a tracking device fitted and use an additional physical deterrent (e.g. steering wheel lock, gear lock, etc). The Sold Secure standard for these devices is recommended.
5. Never leave items on display. It is not necessarily the expensive items that attract a thieves' attention, any item on display could be a target.
6. If there is a portable satnav or dashcam, not only remove it but remove the cradle and wipe any tell-tale suction cup marks from the windscreen.
7. Ensure any leads for external device connection to the vehicles entertainment system are out of sight. If they are on display they are advertising the possibility of the devices themselves still being in the vehicle.

Remember, if a vehicle is secure and clear of items on show, it is much less vulnerable to attack.