



Gloucestershire Trading Standards Service

Martin's Pod

Doorstep Traders

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At this time of year we start to see an increase in complaints about rogue traders calling door to door offering home maintenance work. The complaints involve things like driveway repairs, guttering repairs, garden maintenance and roof repairs.

It is impossible to spot a rogue trader but one of the biggest warning signs is that they don't wait to be invited to visit but instead go door to door looking for customers. They may have some identification and will probably look smart and presentable.

Sometimes they will tell you they are doing some work for the Council or the water board. These statements are false and should put you on your guard. They may say they have noticed that your drive, garden or some other part of your house is in need of work. Usually they will tell you they are working locally. They will also be able to do the job immediately.

Any tradesperson who initiates contact with you for work must, by law, give a written notice of your right to cancel. Rogue traders will not respect this and will always want to start the job the same or next day. Anyone who is this keen must be regarded with suspicion.

From all the rogue trader complaints we see at Trading Standards they nearly all start with a cold call. So our first key message is that a cold call by someone should be a red alert.

You have no way of knowing if they are any good at the job, or whether the price is reasonable. In some situations such as roof repairs you often cannot tell if the work really does need doing. Most importantly you will often have no address or proper name of the tradesperson and will not be able to find them again if you need to. Be wary about paying for materials upfront especially if it is to someone who has turned up unexpectedly. Never pay in full in advance.

If you are considering having work done always make sure you get the proper name and address of the business and check it out by writing to them or if it is local visiting the address just to make sure it is genuine.

Just because a business has an address or a landline number does not mean they are reputable or genuine. So the safest way of getting a good tradesperson is by recommendation. You can also check to see if they are a member of a trade association such as the Guild of Master Craftsmen or Federation of Master Builders. But don't just take the traders word for it. Phone the trade association to check.

If you do need work doing, agreeing to work on the basis of a cold call is the wrong way to go about it. Ask your friends neighbours and relatives for the name of a person they have used for home maintenance work. Before you agree to work, get a clear commitment on the price and what they will do.

Bear in mind that good trades people are busy and you may have to wait a week or two for the job to start.

The best way of dealing with the rogue trader is not to get involved with them in the first place. Doorstep salespeople can be very persuasive and it sometimes helps just to have your own response prepared. Something like I am sorry but I never agree to work on the basis of a cold call. If you are approached by someone for work in the way we have described a firm no thanks should be enough, but if you do have a problem you can contact us for advice. If you feel threatened or intimidated by a rogue trader on your doorstep you should call the police.

We hear a lot of complaints from where work started as the result of a cold call has gone wrong so you are best not using this as way of getting home maintenance work carried out even if the price seems low.

Remember if you want jobs doing ask around your friends and neighbours for anyone they have had carry out work for them. Always get a proper name and address for the business, and get a clear agreement on the price and the work that they will do.

Avoid making a full payment in advance.

If you do have a problem contact Trading Standards for further advice. Our contact details are on our website but if you would like to speak to someone for consumer advice you can speak to consumer direct on 08454 04 05 06.

