

THINK MORE BEFORE BUYING AT YOUR DOOR

Many traders who call at your door are honest and genuine. However, some are not and can be extremely persuasive. Examples of bad practices associated with cold calling and doorstep selling include pressure selling, unfair contracts, overpriced or substandard home maintenance or improvements, phoney consumer surveys and bogus charity collections. The Oldham Doorstep Crime Group led by Trading Standards offers this advice.

The Do's and Don'ts of Doorstep Sales

Do

- Fix a security chain to your door, and make sure you use it every time someone calls. If in doubt say “No thank you” and close the door. Don't be afraid to say No – it doesn't have to be personal, just have a policy of never buying anything at the door.
- Find out the name and address of the seller's company.
- Ask the seller what will happen if you change your mind. In most cases, you will have a seven day 'cooling off' period during which you can cancel the contract (if you've agreed to buy goods and services at your door following an uninvited visit by a salesperson) and, if the firm fails to give you notice of this in writing, you may not have to pay as the contract may be unenforceable.
- Ask for more time if you're not sure, a reputable seller will understand. Ask the caller to leave you with information to study at your leisure.
- Get a receipt with the name, address and phone number of the company on it. Check out the details; if only a mobile number is provided be cautious, a mobile number may not be helpful on its own if something goes wrong.
- Ring Trading Standards 'Trade Safe Scheme' for details of a trader inspected by them if you are looking for work to be done in your home.
- Check out reputable firms by choosing ones that are members of a Trade Association that's signed up to the government-backed Trustmark scheme (www.trustmark.org.uk)

Don't

- Ask a doorstep seller to call unless you are sure you want to buy.
- Let a caller into your home if you are unsure of them.
- Let the seller pressure you into making a decision there and then.
- Pay a deposit unless you're sure you want to buy.
- Agree to have work done on your home without getting a second opinion or further quotes, two or three if possible.

- Be suckered by the promise of discounts, one-day only offers and ‘this deal is only available now’.
- Believe the ‘scare stories’ a seller may tell you – they are rarely true.
- Believe genuine companies have loads left over or cancelled orders – they generally don’t.
- Keep large sums of money in the home.

Tips to keep safe

- Sign up to the Telephone Preference Service (0845 070 0707 or www.tpsonline.org) to cut down on the number of telephone sales calls you receive as these can often lead to unsolicited visits.
- Genuine callers, like meter readers from the utility companies, will always show an I.D card. Check the card carefully and ask for an office number you can call to check their identification.
- You may find it helpful to contact Consumer Direct, the Government's phone and online consumer advice service. They can provide clear, practical advice about your rights, choosing a tradesperson, and what to do if things go wrong. 08454 04 05 06, www.consumerdirect.gov.uk

AND REMEMBER

Lock: Keep your front and back doors locked, even when you’re at home.

Stop: Before you answer, stop to think if you are expecting anyone. Check that you have locked your back door and taken the key out. Look through your spy hole or window to see who the caller is.

Chain: If you decide to open the door, put the door chain or bar on first. Keep it on while you are talking to the caller.

Check: Ask for the caller's identity card and carefully check it, even if they have a prearranged appointment - all genuine callers will carry some ID. Be sure to check that they look like the person on the card, and that their name is the same as any caller you were expecting.

If you are concerned about a doorstep seller in your area contact Consumer Direct who will refer the matter to Trading Standards. If the concern is of an urgent nature contact the police.

New Regulations

The recently introduced Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations also outlines new offences that may apply to doorstep sales. These are:

- Any commercial practice that is aggressive and impairs your freedom of choice or conduct in relation to the goods or products offered is illegal. This includes any harassment, coercion or undue influence.

- Any seller within a commercial practice who falsely represents themselves or their goods may commit an offence.
- Any seller within a commercial practice who uses their livelihood and 'sob stories' to entice you to buy may commit an offence.

N.B. A Commercial Practice under these regulations is deemed as actions, omissions and other conduct by traders, directly connected to the promotion, sale or supply of products, to or from consumers.

Further information on these regulations can be found at www.berr.gov.uk

Contact Details

Consumer Direct - 08454 04 05 06

Greater Manchester Police – 0161 872 5050. However, if it's an emergency or if a crime is being committed or has just been witnessed, there is a risk of injury, or a risk of serious damage to property ring 999

Oldham Trading Standards – 0161 770 3470