

Consumer Alerts – November 2022

Beware Black Friday & Cyber Monday scammers

The 25 and 28 November 2022 sales can give shoppers opportunities to seek out bargains. Lancashire consumers are, however, asked to be on the alert, and not get caught out by scammers.

Sometimes sellers raise the prices before a sales period to make it look like a great deal is on offer. Do your research, shop around before you buy.

Beware scammers misusing known delivery company names such as Royal Mail and DPD. This busy period gives such scammers an opportunity to catch you out, keep track of what you have ordered and when you are expecting delivery.

Beware scammers who may clone websites in an attempt to steal bank details, other sites may sell counterfeit or unsafe goods. Sometimes sites that offer tempting very low priced deals for high value big brand items such as mobile phones, can simply take your money, never deliver the goods and then disappear.

Lancashire consumers are reminded to make sure they know who they are dealing with before buying. Check the address provided on the website, be suspicious if there is no address. Check the returns policy. Check online reviews for the business. Check the address bar shows a padlock for secure payment. For goods over £100, for extra protection, pay on your credit card. Be wary of offers that seem too good to be true and trust your instincts.

Driveway scam

A Lancashire couple paid £7500 up front for a small front garden/ drive to be paved. The

old tarmac has been taken up, the traders have not been back, taking the money and leaving the driveway unsafe and unusable for months.

Rogue traders will often begin a job, doing the work that requires no payment by them to third parties for materials, such as digging up or ripping out. This gives householders confidence to pay large amounts up front as the job looks like it is going well. The trader then disappears with the money.

Trading Standards advice is to not pay upfront, not feel pressured into paying, and only pay at the end when happy with the work.

Dangerous chimney repairs

A retired consumer from the South of the County paid £2500 to have their roof scrubbed to remove moss. The men had very little equipment and caused damage and leaks to the roof. Further work was introduced with the traders fixing a cowl to the chimney which then caused problems to the gas fire which stopped working. The work could have caused a carbon monoxide risk.

Gas Safe have confirmed that doing chimney or cowl work that affects the safety of a gas appliance is gas safety work, and fitters should always check with a Gas Safe qualified operative. Residents are warned not to deal with cold callers, and to have chimney or cowl work carried out safely where gas fires are involved.

Trading Standards advice is to always say no to cold callers. The Safetrader scheme can help you find a trader in your area, contact 0303 333 1111 or go to www.safetrader.org.uk

Starting a new job scam

Residents are warned following a prevalent nationwide scam where a fraudster pretends to be a young person's boss in their new job. The fraudster copies the manager's email address making a small change, then emails the young employee claiming that there are issues with the finance department.

The new starter is asked to buy Apple vouchers and send the codes over to pass to suppliers, with the promise of repayment later that day when the bank account is up and running. The codes are then requested via WhatsApp messages, again set up to look like they are from the boss.

This scam relies on the new employee not wishing to question or disappoint their new employer. One unfortunate young worker in Lancashire lost £300 to this scam.

Copycat websites

These websites are still prevalent in Lancashire. One resident has just lost their AA renewal payment of around £200 by accidentally clicking on a fraudulent website that looked very similar to the real AA website and are struggling to get their money back.

We have received similar issues for lookalike HMRC and DVLA websites. Consumers are advised to check the website address very carefully before inputting any information.

Amazon subscription scam

This is a new version of a scam that has been around for some time and starts with a cold call from someone claiming to work for Amazon.

The number they use may appear to be from the UK, or even local. The caller states that Amazon has tried to refund you the £95 annual subscription fee but, by mistake, have actually refunded you with £9,500. They can produce a fake bank account statement for you to see that makes it look

as though the mistake is genuine and there is indeed an unexpected £9500 in your bank account. They ask you to pay this money back.

In reality, the overpayment has never happened and any money you pay them will be lost. To help you complete the fraud, the caller may ask for your bank account details, or for access to your computer.

Report energy phishing scams

Scam emails and texts relating to energy rebates claiming to be from Ofgem continue to target bill payers. If individuals receive a message that asks for their bank details or to click on a link, they are encouraged to report it and to send a screen shot of the message to report@phishing.gov.uk and to energy.bills.rebate@beis.gov.uk

Further information can be found at www.gov.uk/report-suspicious-emails-websites-phishing

Contact the Trading Standards Service via the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline on 0808 223 1133