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Neighbourhood Watch Newsletter



Cannock Chase, Stafford, South Staffs Districts

April - May 2014

A Change of Contact Details

Monday 31st March 2014 is my last day as a Neighbourhood Watch Manager. After nearly 14 happy years in the role, I am moving on to other things.

Thank you all for your help and support, and I wish Neighbourhood Watch the very best for the future.

Until further notice, please contact Ash Connor for Neighbourhood Watch matters. Telephone 01785-234129, e-mail patrick.connor@staffordshire.pnn.police.uk

Vicki Singleton

It's Cold Caller Season

As the weather improves, there tend to be more cold callers knocking doors.

Cold callers may be offering work around the home and garden, asking residents to sign direct debits to donate to charities, offering small household goods for sale or travelling in vans offering carpets, beds or televisions. Telephone cold callers may include home and security companies trying to make appointments to visit and companies cold calling to offer solutions to cold telephone calls (for a monthly fee).

Some of the above will be genuine, but some may be rogue traders, distraction burglars, or there to gather information on the doorstep for their criminal associates. You can't tell by looking at someone how honest they are.

Dealing with cold callers risks being overcharged for goods or services that may be poor quality from workers that can't be traced once they leave the address, or distracted while an accomplice steals from the address.

If you deal with a rogue trader on the doorstep, your details could be passed to other cold callers so that you receive more visits.

If cold callers don't succeed in your area, they are less likely to come back, and although you may not be at risk, there are vulnerable neighbours in every area that may fall prey to unscrupulous callers. We can all help by not opening the door and not dealing with cold callers.

Anyone needing work around the home and garden is advised to get at least three quotes from different, reputable companies before making a decision. If you don't have a friend or neighbour that can recommend a reliable company, consider using the Staffordshire & Stoke on Trent Traders Register. Details are on the last page of the newsletter.



Preventing vehicle crime

Over the last five years car crime in Staffordshire has fallen significantly. Thefts of and from vehicles fell by nearly 30% whilst the number of car crimes solved rose by 60%.

There's no room for complacency, and we can help to reduce the opportunities for vehicle crime even further by taking simple precautions:

- take all the valuables out of your vehicle when you park, including driving documents – they may help a thief sell your vehicle if it is stolen
- don't rely on electronic key-fob locking, physically check the vehicle is locked and that all the windows are closed
- when you are away from home, try to park in a well-lit area and preferably with closed circuit television (CCTV)
- register your radio and sat-nav on Immobilise
- if possible fit a locking petrol cap
- buy and use a steering wheel lock
- consider fitting a tracking device to your vehicle



Thieves are far more likely to steal from a vehicle than they are to take the vehicle itself. Many criminals take advantage of the opportunities they see - if they go past a car and see a mobile phone on the seat, they may break in and take it. If the vehicle looks empty, they are far more likely to leave it alone.

Why Do Thieves Steal Cars?

Car theft is not a common crime, but incidents do happen and it's worth taking precautions to deter the would-be thief.

There are two types of car thieves: the opportunist and the professional. What they have in common is that they can both steal a car in less than a minute.

The opportunist

The opportunist is a person who may see your car as a means of transport, a joy ride, or to use in committing another type of crime. Older cars may be targeted because they can be easier to break into and may not be fitted with an alarm. Often, when a car has been stolen by an opportunist and is recovered, it is returned to the owner in a damaged condition. Sometimes the criminals sets fire to the vehicle to destroy forensic evidence that could link them to the crime

Professional car thieves

Professional car thieves are motivated differently, stealing cars for profit. They are normally well organised, work in teams and are either after specific car parts or intend to change your car's identity, to resell it later. For example during the past few months Landrover Discovery vehicles of all ages have been targeted across Staffordshire with several incidents of vehicles being stolen and a number of reports of parts being stolen from vehicles. There have also been several car key burglaries in the county where offenders have broken into a house to steal the keys to a good-class car and then used the keys to steal the resident's car (security on some expensive cars is so good that it's easier for the thief to commit a burglary and steal the keys).

If your car is stolen

- Report it to police immediately telling them when and where the car was stolen, and a description of the vehicle including the registration number, make, model and colour of the vehicle.
- Notify your insurance company immediately.

Tips to help you prevent vehicle theft

- Don't leave your vehicle with the keys in the ignition at any time, including when you're loading or unloading shopping or baggage. If you leave the engine running to 'warm up' during the winter months you risk having your vehicle stolen. Drivers should always be in control of their vehicles when the engine is running.
- Close all windows and lock all doors before leaving your car unattended even if you will only be a way for a few moments.
- Do not leave valuables within view, lock them in the boot or take them with you.
- Do not have your personal address on tags attached to car keys, and don't leave personal papers or anything else with your home address in an unattended car. If the car is broken into, this could tell the thief where you live and that you are away from home – making your address vulnerable to burglary..
- Do not hide spare car keys anywhere on the car.

- Burglars have been known to use rods and other tools to fish through letterboxes, windows and even cat-flaps to reach car keys. Don't leave keys where they can be seen and make sure you have good home security.



Please Help

Over 23,600 households in Staffordshire receive OWL messages direct, with around 200 - 300 more registering every month. In South Staffordshire, Stafford and Cannock Districts that is currently an average of 7.3% of households. We want to increase that number to around 25%. It can be done. Hertfordshire has had OWL for a few years longer than Staffordshire and has reached 21%.

Greater membership means that more households receive targeted, timely information about what's going on in their area direct to an e-mail address or phone, and more households are aware of the rogue traders, scams, burglaries and thefts in their area, more households who have up-to-date contact details for the police and other agencies, and more households with a direct telephone number and e-mail address to contact their Neighbourhood Watch Manager with queries or to seek advice.

If you do not receive OWL messages and you receive this newsletter in paper form, and you have internet access, or if it is forwarded to you by someone who is a member of Neighbourhood Watch, please consider registering yourself at www.owl.co.uk, click 'Find a Watch' and enter your details.

If you receive OWL messages direct, but know friends or neighbours who haven't registered yet, please pass on the OWL web site address www.owl.co.uk and suggest that they join. You don't have to have an e-mail address to receive OWL messages. If you know anyone who would like to receive them by telephone or as a mobile text message, we can provide a simple printed registration form.

Contact Ash on 01785-234129 or by e-mail at partick.connor@staffordshire.pnn.police.uk

Annual Springtime Countryside Alert



Egg thieves go out and about in Spring and Summer illegally taking rare bird eggs from nests in our countryside. The outdated pastime of collecting bird's eggs still poses a threat to rare species

Wildflower thefts can also pose a threat to our countryside. It is illegal to uproot and take wildflowers without the permission of the landowner or occupier. However some unscrupulous individuals will dig up wildflowers in springtime for commercial gain.

We can all help to reduce incidents by being vigilant while out in the countryside and reporting any suspicious activity to the police.

Scrap Metal Act 2013

Metal theft is a nation-wide problem and residents regularly raise concerns about the activities of rogue scrap metal collectors, who roam around our streets looking for unwanted metal goods left out for collection.

Unfortunately, there have been too many incidents where the overzealous or unscrupulous scrap collector has taken goods that were not left out for collection, and residents have lost bikes, washing machines, pushchairs, lawn mowers, tools, garden furniture and other metal items that had been left outside an address for a short while.

When such goods are stolen, the finger of suspicion points to scrap collectors, but in the past such thefts have often been difficult to prove because anyone taking these items may have been able to suggest that they reasonably assumed they were scrap, making prosecution difficult.



The Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013 came into force on 1st October 2013, and became fully enforceable on 1st December. There are several significant changes to the law which, hopefully, should help to reduce metal theft. In brief, we understand the following now applies to scrap metal collectors:

□ In addition to the existing waste carriers licence, scrap metal collectors now need a collectors licence, issued by the council for the area in which they are collecting. A licence issued in Walsall, for example, does NOT allow them to collect in Cannock. The council will be able to refuse or revoke licences if a dealer is deemed unsuitable.

□ The collector now needs to keep a record of the name and address of the person from whom they collect, with a signature and description of the item. Therefore, if an item has been taken without your written permission, the collector is breaking the law.

Inspector Jamie Checkland, regional co-ordinator of the metal theft taskforce, said:

"These laws should see the rogue collectors eradicated from our streets. No-one can simply hand over their items for scrap without also giving the collector their details. The laws mean that we should be able to trace the origin of everything that is taken as scrap meaning that thefts and illicit dealing should be a thing of the past."

"We are quite sure that most people are not aware of these changes, and look forward to further publicity and action taken against those breaking the law".

Scams, a Reminder

Many scams arrive by e-mail, letter, phone call or text message. They may even appear on social networking sites such as Facebook. Most scams aim to gather personal details in order to commit fraud or steal a person's identity, or to obtain money directly from the victim.

Scams aren't new, some can be traced back to the 1920s.

Help to reduce the opportunity for scams by:

- Registering with the Telephone Preferencing Service on **0845-070-0707** to reduce the number of telephone cold callers
- Keep your computer Firewalls and Anti-virus software up to date
- Never give personal or bank details to a stranger. If you think the request comes from a genuine source, contact the caller yourself to check that the request is not bogus
- On the computer, don't open attachments unless you're sure that they're genuine, be cautious even with e-mails from friends if they look out of the ordinary - some viruses can send an e-mail to everyone in an infected address box
- Never follow a link on an e-mail unless you are sure it is genuine
- Never reply to letters, e-mails or text messages that may be scams. If you do, you may be put onto the 'suckers list' and receive more scams in the future.



Keep in view that you can't win a lottery or a prize unless you bought a ticket, and if an offer sounds too good to be true, it probably isn't genuine.

If you think that you have been the victim of a scam, report the matter to Action Fraud, telephone number 0300-123-2040 or on-line at www.actionfraud.org.uk/reportfraud

If you use the internet, check out scams at the following sites: www.hoax-slayer.com
www.snopes.com

During the last few weeks, members of Neighbourhood Watch in our own Districts have reported the following scams:

'HOLIDAY ROBBERY EMAIL' SCAM You receive an email from a friend or member of the family, suggesting they are on holiday abroad and have been robbed. The email asks for transfer of money to help. The sender's email address book will have been hijacked, and the same message sent to all contacts. Protect your email address book by deleting any emails from unknown senders without opening them, do not reply to 'phishing' emails asking you to update details, and install security software.

'ASKING FOR DIRECTIONS' SCAM You are approached by (usually) a female in a supermarket car park, after returning to your car with your shopping. She asks for directions, and often shows you a map. While helping and distracted, a second offender removes your bank card from your car. The offenders will have been able to see your pin number being entered at the checkout; cash will be withdrawn from your account before you realise your card has been stolen. It has also been known for the offenders to follow the victim home, and approach them there. Please be aware of anyone paying close attention at checkouts, and wary if asked for directions

'DROPPED CASH' DISTRACTION SCAM You are approached by a stranger, who suggests you have dropped a £10 note. This usually happens shortly after you have withdrawn cash at a cash machine, or used a card to pay for items at a supermarket. The stranger is usually insistent, asking you to check your purse or wallet. While distracted in this way, your bank card is stolen, and then used to withdraw cash. It is likely the offender will have been able to see you enter your pin number

'MICROSOFT COMPUTER' SCAM You receive a telephone call, claiming to be from 'Microsoft' or 'Windows', suggesting there is a problem with your computer. The caller often asks you to switch on your computer, and provide information which will allow them to access it remotely. You will be charged around £150, and damaging software may be installed on your computer. Microsoft will never contact you in this way

Internet safety

The internet is an exciting and interesting tool, but the increase in on-line banking and shopping is being met by a rise in its use for criminal purposes. Sensible precautions will help to keep you safe on line

1. Protect your PC

Install good anti-virus/anti-spyware software and a firewall.

Keep your computer up to date i.e. run 'windows updates' and Use an up-to-date web browser

Block spam emails and beware bogus emails and attachments - don't open emails from people you don't know

Regularly back-up your information on discs, usb stick or an external hard drive

Secure your Wi-Fi using the encryption option. If you can access it without entering security data so can someone else in the vicinity

Choose strong passwords which use a mixture of numbers, upper-case and lowercase letters and symbols. Don't pick obvious passwords e.g. birthdays or names and make sure you use different passwords for different sites

Use your computer in administrator mode. Create a user account and use that on a day to day basis

2. Social Networking

Set security levels so that just your friends can view your profile

Pick a username that doesn't include your real name

Be very cautious about posting identifying information about yourself or your family: e.g. your address, phone number or mother's maiden name, pets name or date of birth that could be used to identify your security passwords

Remember what goes online stays online. Don't say or publish anything that you may regret later

Don't arrange to meet someone that you have only met online - some people lie online and may not be who they say they are.

If someone contacts you with weird or nasty messages, don't reply to them. Save the messages and contact the forum administrator.

3. Online finance and shopping

When shopping online always use common sense - if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is

Use secure websites. Look for "https:///" and the padlock image to show that the site is secure

Use a secure payment option such as PayPal or a dedicated or pre-pay credit card for all online purchases

Be aware that sponsored links at the top or side of search page pay to be there. These are not always reliable and can be used by criminals

Remember banks and financial institutions do not send emails asking you to verify your bank details by clicking on a link. Do not trust such emails, no matter how authentic they appear. You can always call your bank using the phone number on a genuine piece of correspondence, website (typed directly into the address bar)

Useful Contact Details

Staffordshire Police Emergency Number

In the case of an emergency call **999**

Staffordshire Police Non Emergency Number 101

For all non-emergency calls. The call handler will transfer you to the most appropriate person to deal with your enquiry.

www.staffordshire.police.uk

The Chase Watch Team

We provide members of Neighbourhood Watch and other Watches with support, guidance and advice:

Ash Connor: Telephone 01785-234129
e-mail:
patrick.connor@staffordshire.pnn.police.uk

OWL (On-line Watch Link): www.owl.co.uk

Staffordshire Fire & Rescue

Non Emergency Number: 08451-22-11-55

For information and advice.

Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Trader Register

Many consumers find it difficult to find a trader they can rely upon. The Trader Register aims to reassure consumers, providing advice and information on employing a trader and working together to get things right first time. The Register covers all aspects of home improvement and repair work, including building, carpentry, external property repairs, decorating and home security. To contact the register please call **01785 330888** between 10am and 4pm or visit the web site at: www.traderregister.org.uk

Action Fraud

Report scams and fraud by calling **0300-123-2040** or visit www.actionfraud.police.uk

Consumer Advice: call 08454 04 05 06 www.adviceguide.org.uk

The Citizens Advice Consumer Service provides practical consumer advice on all kinds of consumer issues from problems with cars to faulty household appliances

Staffordshire Trading Standards:

01785 277888 for free information, advice and assistance to consumers.

Fly Tipping

Report fly tipping to your local council:

Cannock Chase District Council

01543 462621

Stafford Borough Council

01785 619401

South Staffs Council

01902 696000

Preferencing Services

To cut down on telephone cold-calling telephone **0845 070 0707**.

The call must be made from the telephone number receiving the unwanted calls. You can also use this number to reduce the number of unwanted text messages to your mobile phone.

To prevent silent calls from companies using random dialling call **0844-372-2325**

To cut down on personally addressed junk mail, call **0207-291-3310** Allow at least four months before you will see a reduction in the amount you receive.

Staffordshire Trading Standards

**24 hour Rapid Response Team:
0777 379 2252**

They can advise or respond to anyone in the community who thinks that they are being targeted by a rogue doorstep trader. The team are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Crimestoppers: 0800 555 111

To pass specific information about crime or criminals, anonymously, without direct contact with the police.

Cannock Chase District Council 01543-462621

S Staffs District Council 01902-696000

Stafford Borough Council 01785-619000

Immobilise

Register your valuables on the world's largest FREE register of ownership details at: www.immobilise.com

Staffordshire Cares

For information about things to do, help around the home and garden, helpful household gizmos, keeping safe within the community and much more

Call **0300-111-8010**

www.staffordshirecares.info