

Trading Standards News

A summary of work and Facebook posts by the Trading Standards Service



Is your trader the real deal?

Finding a reputable trader to carry out home improvement works can be a difficult and often stressful time.

Get it wrong and it can be very costly!

Leicestershire County Council Trading Standards have recently seen an influx of builders, that on the face of it, seem to be honest, trustworthy and reliable tradespeople, but all too quickly it becomes evident that this is not the case.

Consumers have reported that not only have they paid money upfront, but many have had to fork out further funds to rectify the work that has been completed, and also to complete the job itself.

What to look out for

Whilst many traders run a professional business, there are those few that look to take advantage and exploit consumers and their homes. So, what should you be looking out for? Below are some potential tell-tale signs:

- The trader cannot provide references
- They have knocked on your door asking for work or suggest you need work and could even start straight away
- They ask for payment upfront and often in cash, maybe they suggest that this is to 'keep the cost low' for you
- They don't provide you with a full written contract, details of the job and cost before commencement of any works
- Their timekeeping is poor
- A trader who keeps finding 'extra jobs' that need doing
- A disregard for health and safety – have they gone up on your roof with just a ladder?

What can you do?

- Don't be rushed - Never agree to the first quote. This could be someone on your doorstep or someone offering a onetime reduced cost if you sign up now. Don't be drawn into these seemingly good offers. If someone is able to start straightaway, think, how good can they really be if they have no other work on? They may try to state that they can fit you in, or have some materials left over or even that they will reschedule someone else's job just for you. Don't be fooled, obtain at least 3 independent quotes to enable you to make the most informed decision
- Don't pay upfront and in cash (and don't keep large amounts of cash in your home) – we often hear that traders tell consumers that if they pay in cash, they will be able to keep the cost lower by not including VAT. Agree before hand the payment schedule and never pay the full amount in one go. Use your credit or debit card or cheque or bank transfer, at least this way you will have some details of the trader. You can't trace cash!
- Do your research – By not agreeing there and then, this gives you time to make some checks. Can you find and confirm their contact details? Are they members of any trade associations that they claim to be? Can they evidence previous jobs? Put their details into a search engine – what kind of things come up? Previous customers will often leave reviews on the internet, good or bad.
- Ask to see evidence of qualifications and insurance – if the trader says they are qualified in an area of work, ask for their evidence. Some you can check yourself, such as if they are Gas Safe qualified, NICEIC for electricians and renewable energy installers. Ask for evidence of their insurance and guarantee company.

- Obtain full details – ask for full written details of the work to be completed, the cost including any payment schedule and the trader’s identity. Don’t be fobbed off with excuses such as they will send it to you, the printer is broken, they will get it to you soon. Always have the information before agreeing for any work to be carried out
- Complaints procedure – Does the trader have one? Know what to do and how to complain if you do experience any problems. Traders might say that they don’t need one, as they never get any complaints, but even if this is the case, they should be prepared should it happen and be able to give you details.
- Trust your instincts – if something doesn’t feel right, don’t agree to anything and get a second opinion
- Talk - to friends, family and neighbours about the work that you want or are having done. They may be able to provide a recommendation of someone they have used and help to keep an eye on things whilst the work is being completed.

There are many trade associations and schemes out there to help you find a trader, to help you take the uncertainty out of who you employ and let into your home. They may also offer a complaints procedure and mediation if you do find yourself in a dispute that you just can’t resolve. But these shouldn’t replace your own research. Many of the schemes don’t check the trader’s credentials and may be a trader matching site for you to list your job for traders to contact you.

It’s your home and your money, be confident in who you employ.

Other news

Scammers and Fraudsters - are turning their hands to new ways of parting you with your money. Below are some of the most recent scams that residents of Leicestershire have been targeted with:

- Emails and text messages pretending to be a council tax rebate and asking you to ‘click the link’
- Emails telling the resident that they are due a refund from HMRC and to ‘click the link’ to obtain this refund
- Action Fraud has received 164 reports from individuals that have fallen victim to fraudulent investment scams via social media– a consumer will pay a few hundred pounds for a return that is multiplied. Once they have paid, the fraudster then blocks the consumer
- Trading Standards have received numerous complaints about copycat websites that charge a fee for processing tax rebates, allowance such as marriage and uniforms and renewing official documents. These websites might say they are not affiliated with the government department, but it is not always clear and consumers often find they receive little or no rebate at all for something that they could have done themselves for free
- Scammers targeting mobile phone subscribers often use tactics such as suggesting disconnection or penalties if a consumer fails to respond to their message. Don’t give out personal information or follow links sent to you. Contact your provider directly through your app or using the details on a recent bill
- One elderly consumer received a telephone call from scammers requesting 35k for ‘nephews cancer treatment’. Thankfully the victim spoke about this with neighbours who called the Police and no money was handed over

Safety and counterfeiting

- 1000’s of unsafe sunglasses are regularly being imported through East Midlands airport – counterfeit and cheap imports may offer no UVA and UVB protection
- During checks by the safety team, fairy lights containing 70 times the amount of a chemical harmful to children were safely removed from the market.
- The office of product safety have launched their summer safety campaign warning consumers to be wary of summer holiday bargains that can be harmful if poorly manufactured or left unguarded. These include items such as paddling pool heaters.

If you wish to report a matter or for further free advice and guidance on this and other areas of Trading Standards work, please visit: <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/business-and-consumers/trading-standards>

Tel: 0808 223 1133 Email: tradingstandards@leics.gov.uk  /LeicsTradingStandards