Hertfordshire County Council warns residents to be vigilant against rogue traders

On average, almost 250 reports of rogue trading are made each year in Hertfordshire, but it is estimated that only between five and 20 per cent of these crimes are reported – that's why Hertfordshire County Council's Trading Standards team is advising residents to follow a few top tips:

1. Say no to doorstep callers. Do not buy goods or services at the door.
2. If you are considering having work done, always shop around first and get at least three quotes.
3. You can search for a Hertfordshire Trading Standards Approved Trader on the [Which? Trusted Traders website](#) or by calling Trading Standards.
4. Honest businesses agree pricing beforehand, including VAT. There's no evidence without a written contract.
5. Avoid paying cash in hand. It's better to pay by bank transfer or cheque, as these can be traced.
6. If you think you or a vulnerable relative or neighbour has become the victim of a rogue trader, report it straight away.

David Russell, 67, from Ware, contacted a local trader when he had a problem with a drain in his back garden.

"From the beginning, the trader didn't seem the least bit friendly. After about an hour he came and he said, 'Well, this is going to cost more than we thought […] because I need more equipment.' He was there for about five hours altogether, and as time went on seemed to get unhappier."

The trader quoted him £200, but David was charged almost £1,500 – for a job that wasn't done to a satisfactory standard.

"I did write a cheque and when I thought about it the next day or so, I thought, well this is really a bit too much, I should take advice on this. I was speaking to friends, and one of them recommended that I go to Trading Standards. I phoned them up and spoke to them and they said, 'Well, the first thing to do is to cancel the cheque.'."

David was lucky as he contacted Trading Standards quickly and was able to cancel his cheque before it was cashed. As the trader had failed to give cancellation rights or indicate VAT-inclusive prices, Trading Standards brought him to court, where he pleaded guilty and was fined a total of £2,400 for David's case and two others. The company he worked for was also fined a total of £5,600.

Richard Thake, Cabinet Member for Community Safety at Hertfordshire County Council, said: "Hertfordshire County Council is committed to keeping residents safe, so we recommend that everybody reads and shares this advice, particularly with vulnerable older relatives and neighbours. If you've been targeted by a rogue trader, don't let them get away with it. Always report anything suspicious to our Trading Standards team."

Russell Reeder, Principal Trading Standards Officer at Hertfordshire County Council, said: "It may be tempting to just find someone in the phone book or say yes to the trader that's just knocked on your door but, as David's story shows, you don't know that you'll be getting a fair price or a good service."

He added, "Our partnership with Which? Trusted Traders helps consumers to find reliable traders who have been thoroughly assessed and checked."

- Get advice through Hertfordshire County Council's website at www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/tradingstandards
- Report rogue traders through the Citizens Advice consumer service on 03454 04 05 06
- Search for trusted traders at http://trustedtraders.which.co.uk/