

Information Network Bulletin

Edition 3- 2025/26

Welcome to the latest edition of the Information Network Bulletin brought to you by Croydon Council's Trading Standards team.

In addition to general news from the team, it includes details of some of the latest scams and fraud alerts which we have become aware of in recent months.

We hope that you find it useful.

NEW FRIENDS AGAINST SCAMS APP

Our National Trading Standards Scams Team colleagues have launched a brand-new tool, a Friends Against Scams App, to help you spot doorstep, mail, email & phone scams, and that shows you how to check the likelihood of something you have received is real or fake in partnership with Ask Silver, using their technology. You can Ask Silver to check if a text message, website, or letter is likely to be a scam or not. You will get a result in seconds, with some helpful information to guide you through your next steps before you spend any of your money.

Available free of charge in your app store, this innovation also offers simple training messages to help educate you, so that you can then support your friends and family with their queries about fraud & scams.

If you don't want to have a new App, the Ask Silver scam checker is available on What's App and you can sign up on this link: [Ask Silver- Free Scam Checker](https://www.ask-silver.com/) (https://www.ask-silver.com/)

or if you prefer not to sign up, then you can use the same technology to check on the Get Safe Online website here: (no sign-up needed) [Ask Silver - Get Safe Online](https://www.getsafeonline.org/asksilver/) (https://www.getsafeonline.org/asksilver/)

Whichever way you access Ask Silver, simply take a photo of the letter you want to query or a screenshot of a text message or email, then send it to the Ask Silver website. You will get a result straightaway that can help you do further research. Do this research before you make any payments or send any cash, but don't send telephone numbers, bank account details, postal or email addresses, or any photos of you or anyone else to Ask Silver.



Keep your roof a Safe Space for Santa

It's the time of year when most people are being careful with their money. Be it budgeting for Christmas, for the higher winter bills or even starting to save for a special holiday next summer; the last thing anyone wants is to lose their hard-earned money to a rogue trader. Sadly, we continue to receive reports of residents losing money to these rogue traders.

Traditionally these traders would cold call at people's homes, offering to do work such as gutter clearing for £50, or more commonly advising the homeowner that they have noticed a problem with their guttering or roof. This opening gambit is just an excuse to be allowed put a ladder up and gain access to the roof, as a short while later they will tell the home owner that they have found all sorts of problems up there – loose ridge tiles, slipped and broken roof tiles, chimneys about to collapse, rotten battens, roof felt needing replacing the list goes on and on.

Luckily they are available to carry out this work for you straight away, the scaffolding arrives almost immediately, as do the requests for payments. An upfront deposit, money for the scaffolding, for materials.... for more materials as they have found something new to replace, then to pay their workers. How long does this go on for How much money have you got?

The repeated demands for payment come thick and fast, to stop you pausing to think about what is going on or to speak to a relative or friend about it, as you may realise what is happening and call the Police. Once cash only people, these days rogue traders are happy to take payment by bank transfers, as these are frequently done by the homeowner using their phone, so less chance of them going into the bank to make the transfer and being asked questions about what the payment is for, who it is going to, invoices being looked at, etc, and the fact that they are being scammed by a rogue trader coming to light. Since there will usually be several people working at any one time, the homeowner is usually outnumbered and discouraged from questioning why the price is going up again.

Eventually, it comes to an end. There is no more money, or the trader becomes concerned that they may be reported by the homeowner, so takes one last payment and then leaves and doesn't return. The work may or may not be complete. It may be a half-decent job, or a lot of remedial work may be needed. What we do know is that the homeowner will have lost money that will now have a significant impact on them and their future. After all the stress and upset caused by the trader and the loss of money, they are likely to have to now try and find a reputable trader to take a look at the work done and tell them if it is reasonable, or whether remedial work is needed as it has not been done properly, there are gaps, etc. The homeowner now needs to the remedial work more scaffolding, knowing that any requests for the return of their money will fall on deaf ears. Worse still, the much-publicised bank reimbursements for Authorised Push Payment (APP) fraud, are proving not to be a solution in these situations. Banks dismiss claims as 'buyer seller disputes' and refuse claims for refunds made by the homeowners.

We are also getting increasing numbers of reports from residents who need work done and have sourced a trader by searching online for 'roofer, builder, etc', or looked on local neighbourhood-type groups, posted the job on a trader platform or sourced the trader via a trader platform. The traders give a quote and if selected will usually be able to start fairly soon.. They may have said that the work will only take a few days, but they will typically require a 50% deposit up front. They will start work and quickly need money for materials, then more money for materials. Once the job is part done, they will fail to arrive for work as their van has broken down, a family member is sick, etc, they will re-arrange a new date ... but they don't. The excuses keep coming and then they stop responding altogether. The homeowner has lost the money that they had put aside for the work to be done, the work is incomplete or done badly and so they now have to save once again to have it done properly. AAP fraud claims made to the banks may be refused refunds as the trader has done some work, so the banks may class it as a 'buyer seller dispute'.

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Keep your roof a Safe Space for Santa (cont.)

The majority of the rogue trader reports that we receive concern roofing work, because people are generally unable to see what is going on up on their roof and can't challenge what the rogue trader tells them. Is the photo of the loose ridge tiles and broken/slipped tiles of your roof or is it a picture of another roof that the trader has saved on his phone to use with people who have that type of tile on their roof?

Remember, if someone helpfully tells you that you have a problem with your home. Thank them and say that you have someone who will sort it out for you and stop your conversation with them there.

If you have, or think you may have, a problem with your home that needs attention; make sure you use a reliable means to source a trader to come out and take a look.

The following platforms vet traders before that allow them to join and they also offer a mediation service:



Buy With Confidence

www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk / 01392 383 430

Which? Trusted Traders

<http://trustedtraders.which.co.uk/> 0117 405 4689

Which?

So as we approach this festive season remember, keep your roof a safe space for Santa!

If you think you have been the victim of a rogue trader, report this to:

The Citizens Advice Consumer Service on 0808 223 1133 (Minicom users should call on 08451 281384) 0900 – 1700 Monday to Friday, excluding bank holidays and public holidays. Or at weekends via <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/get-more-help/report-to-trading-standards/>

Action Fraud via <https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/>

Illicit Tobacco in Croydon

Croydon Trading Standards are continuing our work to remove illegal tobacco from the borough.

If you are aware of any shops or traders selling illegal tobacco, which includes counterfeit and non-duty paid cigarettes or hand-rolling tobacco, foreign brands of cigarettes with no legal market in the UK and banned oral tobacco, or any traders selling singles, please report them to us.

The sale of illegal tobacco products undermines legitimate traders, puts people's health at risk and puts traders at risk of prosecution and having their alcohol licence reviewed if they are found to be supplying illegal products.

The main way to report any issue to Trading Standards in the first instance is via the Citizens Advice Consumer Advice line on **0808 223 1133** or via their '**Chat Service**' or an **online reporting form** – all found at <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/get-more-help/if-you-need-more-help-about-a-consumer-issue/>

Alternatively, you can email us at trading.standards@croydon.gov.uk

Don't commit a faux pas this Christmas

Trading Standards are warning parents that counterfeit toys are putting children at risk. The Fake Toys, Real Harms campaign - spearheaded by the Intellectual Property Office (IPO) along with leading toy retailers, local authorities and social media influencers - is highlighting the dangers identified by expert testing of the goods seized.

Home Office figures reveal that around 259,000 fake toys worth over £3.5m have already been seized by Border Force at the UK border this year. These include items toys containing banned chemicals linked to cancer, dangerous choking hazards, and other serious risks, including in toys marketed at toddlers and infants

Every parent particularly at Christmas wants to give their children what they want, but know that lots of the "must have" toys are prohibitively expensive. Although understandable, the research suggests that although over 90% of consumers are aware of the counterfeit products, only 27% of toy buyers cite safety as a factor that influences their decision.

However, The Fake Toys, Real Harms campaign warns parents and present buyers that counterfeit toys, while often cheaper, could have devastating consequences for children's health and safety. Fake toys will invariably have been manufactured shabbily, they may have sharp edges or long cords which can be a strangulation hazard.

They may contain easily accessible small magnets or button batteries which for toddlers can be fatal. Items like dressing up costumes may not have been properly treated to ensure they are not a fire risk. Fakes often have poor quality finishes, such as easily detachable eyes or limbs fixed with metal spikes, which can cause injuries

Criminals involved in counterfeiting target a wide range of toys across multiple categories. Currently two items are particularly sought after: Labubu Dolls, the collectible furry monster-faced creatures, which have become a global viral sensation; and Disney Stitch Plush Toys, the interactive plush versions of the character from Lilo & Stitch.

Toys are of course not the only items which can be a threat at Christmas. Items such as Christmas tree lights, if not manufactured in accordance with safety regulations, can cause electrical fires and ruin a Christmas.

There are already issues with lithium batteries associated with the ever popular electrical scooters (which are anyway illegal to use in public spaces) but cheap copies are particularly dangerous.

Given how difficult sometimes it is to tell just by the packaging whether an item is counterfeit and potentially unsafe (although authentic toys sold in the UK and Europe must have a **CE** or **UKCA** safety mark), you can still take some simple precautions.

Buy from trusted sources – online may be cheaper but reputable stores offer security. Be Wary of "Too Good to Be True" Deals: fake items are often sold at significantly lower prices than the official versions. If a deal seems incredibly cheap, it is likely a fake and potentially unsafe product.

Finally, consider purchasing a product which may not have the cachet of the original, but offers the same experience. Rather than, for instance, buying fake Lego, buy instead one of the many other genuine brands which are more affordable and, most importantly, are safe.

If you have any concerns about the safety of items you are looking to purchase for Christmas, please contact us at trading.standards@croydon.gov.uk

Keep Children Safe from Button Batteries

Button Batteries: The Risks

Trading Standards, The Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) and the Child Accident Prevention Trust, is continuing to raise awareness among parents and carers about the potential dangers to children from swallowing button batteries.

Why are button batteries so dangerous?

Button batteries are small, round, silver-coloured batteries that come in many different sizes and types. They power many of our devices at home to make our lives more convenient.

Most button batteries pass through the body without a problem. But if a lithium coin cell battery gets stuck in the food pipe, energy from the battery reacts with saliva to create caustic soda. This is the same chemical used to unblock drains!

This can burn through the food pipe, to the main artery and lead to catastrophic internal bleeding and death. The chemical reaction can happen in as little as two hours. However, sometimes it takes days or even weeks.

Lithium coin cell batteries can also cause life-changing injuries. There is a risk that the food pipe is too badly damaged for a child to eat normally again, or the vocal cords are too badly damaged for a child to speak normally again.

Size matters

The size and power of the button battery and the size of the child matter.

Lithium button batteries (often called 'coin batteries' or 'coin cell batteries') are more powerful than other button batteries and many are also bigger.

With a large, powerful lithium coin cell battery – for example a 3V CR2025, CR2032, CR2330 or CR3032 – and a small child, the risks are greatest.

Flat' or 'dead' batteries

It's not just fully charged lithium coin cell batteries that pose a risk to children.

Modern devices need a lot of power. When power levels drop, we think the battery is flat and discard it. But it can still have enough electrical charge left to badly injure a child.

Who is at risk?

Children are most at risk from 1 to 4 years, but younger and older children can also be at risk.

Crawling babies up to pre-schoolers are at particular risk as they explore the world by putting things in their mouths. Toddlers are naturally inquisitive and can be very determined to explore and get into things.

Older children can be fascinated by them too. In some cases, they may deliberately put one of these batteries in their mouth or on their tongue to experience the sensation of the electrical charge.

Follow these simple tips to help protect children, from the dangers of button batteries

Five top tips to keep children safe from button batteries

Button batteries can badly hurt or kill a small child if they swallow one. They look like a coin.

Follow our tips to keep your child safe:

- **LOOK** around your home for button batteries. Think toys, lights, remote controls and more.
- **CHECK** for products with loose backs and button batteries that have dropped out.
- **STORE** button batteries in a safe place, up high and out of your child's reach.
- **DISPOSE** of used button batteries as soon as you can. They are still unsafe.
- **ACT** if you think your child may have swallowed a button battery, go straight to A&E or call an ambulance

More information

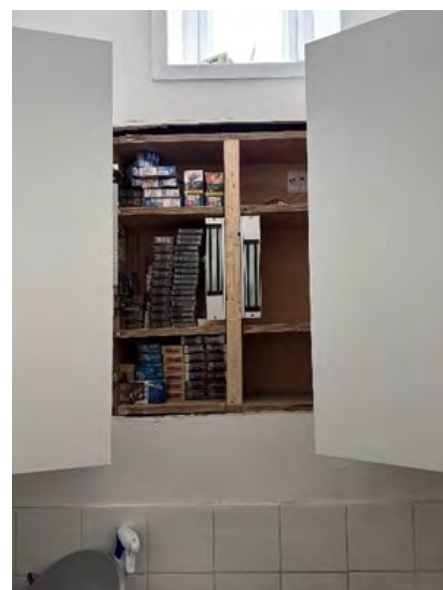
Go to the **Child Accident Prevention Trust website** at <https://capt.org.uk/button-batteries-understanding-the-risks/>

Targeting the Criminals Selling Illicit Tobacco

Croydon Trading Standards are continuing to target illegal tobacco sellers in Croydon. Illegal tobacco comes in a variety of forms and is generally smuggled into the UK. You may be able to spot the packaging as it is often in brightly coloured packs not the standard pantone, have foreign languages on the packaging, it could be counterfeit and look very similar to genuine products, and often includes brands that are not sold in the UK.

The types of shops we often find selling it are small shops who appear to sell relatively little else, other than a small amount of pre-packaged sweets, crisps and soft drinks in the front of the shop, or just vapes and shisha pipes.

We receive information, often from the public, about shops who are selling illicit tobacco, and we undertake inspections using specially trained tobacco dogs. We are finding increasing numbers of these premises are going to extreme lengths to try and disguise their criminal behaviour.



Images of illicit tobacco being stored underneath a bed in the back room of a shop and behind a cupboard attached to a wall. The whole cabinet opened off from the wall which they had damaged installing the hide. They could not fool the dog though!

Electromagnetic hides are installed to keep the illegal products hidden from view. The hides are disguised in the walls and floors so when they are not open, you would not see anything unusual. Coffee grounds and moth balls are placed inside the hides with the tobacco to distract the dogs. We often find evidence of people sleeping and living on the premises to protect their criminal enterprise.



This hide had been drilled into the wall causing significant damage. The wall looked like a simple panelled wall, but the dog sniffed through the coffee beans and told us there was definitely tobacco present!

Targeting the Criminals Selling Illicit Tobacco (cont.)

Please do not be fooled into thinking this is just low-level criminality. The whole process is detrimental to our community. The criminals avoid paying any duty on the smuggled products meaning less money goes into the public purse and less money goes into the treatment of tobacco related illnesses.

These businesses also use 'ghost directors'; where people's details are used to front these business and limited companies, but who often have limited control over the business. This type of practice is used to frustrate law enforcement and make prosecution difficult, as it is hard to ascertain who is responsible. They create limited companies which dissolve after a year having submitted no accounts. They avoid prosecution by dissolving companies or starting a new one. It is a recognised pattern of behaviour that aids criminality.

These criminal enterprises are a blight on our communities.

We are now working with landlords who are often unaware their commercial premises are being used by criminals pretending to be legitimate businesses. Once we have identified a premises selling illicit, smuggled and counterfeit tobacco we are engaging with Landlords to explain what is happening. Landlords can take action to evict the tenants as criminal activity is often a breach of the lease or tenancy. Responsible landlords want to support the local community and legitimate businesses who suffer a financial detriment to their business. We really appreciate this cohesive approach because it means we can work together to improve the communities we all live and work in.

Since November 2024 we have seized 109,460 illicit cigarettes and over 23kg of Hand Rolling Tobacco. We have also seized 174 packets of banned oral tobacco. This type of oral tobacco is banned due to the serious oral health implications of its use.

You can help tackle this criminality and support genuine local businesses!

Croydon Trading Standards are working hard to eliminate illegal tobacco from the borough. Illegal tobacco supports criminals and organised crime and harms genuine traders. If you are aware of any shops or traders selling illegal tobacco that includes counterfeit and non-duty paid cigarettes or hand-rolling tobacco, foreign brands of cigarettes with no legal market in the UK and banned oral tobacco, or any traders selling singles, please report them to us.

The main way to report any issue to Trading Standards in the first instance is via the Citizens Advice Consumer Advice line on **0808 223 1133** or online at <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer>

You can also **report anonymously via the London Trading Standards Reporting tool:**
<https://www.londontradingstandards.org.uk/report-consumer-crime/>

trueCall38

Do you get annoyed when you fill in a form and have to enter your phone number even when you know that the company doesn't really need it? What are they going to do with it? Who will they give it to?

Your privacy is valuable – protect your phone number with trueCall38. The solution: enter their phone number 0333 88 88 88 88 (that's three threes, eight eights) as your phone number, and if, or rather when, they call, those cold call culprits will hear their short but sweet recorded message: "trueCall38 is handling my calls. I prefer not to be contacted by phone, so please contact me via my email address. Goodbye!"

Note: Some online forms are very fussy and won't accept the full trueCall38 number. If the number is rejected then enter 0333 8888 888 (three threes, seven eights).



Disposable vapes banned – our work to ensure compliance with the new law

Croydon Trading Standards are continuing to carry out work in relation to vapes across the borough. From 1 June 2025, the sale and supply of single-use vapes was banned across the UK. The new regulations address the environmental and public health challenges posed by disposable vapes. Businesses in Croydon were given advice from Croydon Trading Standards and encouraged to review their stock to prepare for these changes to ensure compliance with the law.

From 1 June 2025, it is illegal for businesses to sell or supply, offer to sell or supply, or have in their possession for sale or supply all single-use or 'disposable' vapes. This applies to:

- sales online and in shops
- all vapes whether or not they contain nicotine

Vapes are still legal to sell providing they have a battery that can be recharged and be able to be refilled with vape liquid either by having a refillable tank/cartridge or having pods that can be replaced.

We have an ongoing programme of inspections to visit traders that sell vapes and we are very pleased to see that most of our retailers have adhered to the advice and removed disposable vapes from sale.

However, there have been several traders who have continued to sell disposable vapes.

Since 1st June 2025 we have seized 10,947 disposable vapes.

We will continue to seize and destroy disposable vapes we see on sale.

If you know of any retailers that are still selling **disposable vapes**, please let us know by reporting to:

Citizens Advice Consumer Advice line on **0808 223 1133** or online at <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer>

You can also **report anonymously via the London Trading Standards Reporting tool:**
<https://www.londontradingstandards.org.uk/report-consumer-crime/>

YOUNG VOLUNTEERS WANTED

Trading Standards uses volunteers aged between 14 -16 to help us monitor the sale of age restricted products across the borough, and we need more children in that age group to come forward. The volunteer scheme is unpaid but any volunteers that help us receive a certificate, that can support their record of educational achievement. The type of volunteering involved will also help with improving their self-confidence and give them valuable experience in an operational environment. Refreshments are also provided.

We run the sessions throughout the year, generally during school holidays, but they can sometimes be at the weekend or during the evening. And a volunteer will usually be with us for about 5 – 7 hours depending on the work being carried out.

Here is the link that gives further information and details of how to apply, or if you have any further questions about the scheme.

[Young volunteers wanted to help monitor age restricted sales | Croydon Council](https://www.croydon.gov.uk/business-licences-and-tenders/trading-standards/trading-standards-consumer-advice-and-guidelines/under-age-sales/volunteers-wanted-under-age-sale-purchases)

(<https://www.croydon.gov.uk/business-licences-and-tenders/trading-standards/trading-standards-consumer-advice-and-guidelines/under-age-sales/volunteers-wanted-under-age-sale-purchases>)



Want to keep your home warm this winter without overpaying on your energy bills?

Croydon Healthy Homes is a free Croydon Council energy advice service for home owners and private tenants

Our qualified energy advisors can:

- Help you set your heating controls, so you can stay warm at home, but not more than necessary on your energy bills
- Assess whether your home could benefit from any government funded energy efficiency measures, such as insulation
- Offer advice if you are struggling to pay your energy bills
- Offer advice about condensation

One-to-one support through Croydon Healthy Homes is initially through a telephone consultation. Where appropriate and at our discretion we can offer follow up home visits and other face to face support.



To apply for one-to-one support please visit
www.croydon.gov.uk/healthyhomes

If you are not online please leave a voice message on Freephone
0800 2922529

If you rent your home from Croydon Council or a Housing Association,
please speak to your housing officer if you require any advice and support
about your energy bills or your home

CROYDON
www.croydon.gov.uk

The BSL Consumer Hub

British Sign Language (BSL) is a legally recognised language in England, Wales and Scotland. The BSL Consumer Hub has been developed in partnership with Trading Standards experts to help BSL users learn more about a range of consumers issues.

The link below takes you to the website which has a range of videos in BSL, mainly targeted at product safety issues. There will be more videos added as times goes on to cover more consumer issues.

<https://www.bslconsumer.org.uk>

The BSL Consumer Hub has been developed in partnership by Bolton Deaf Society, Deafway, Deaf Empowering Network and Closha Associates

Friends Against Scams also has a BSL video for online scams awareness training with an accompanying script. <https://www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk/bsl>

The Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) also have a helpful website, full of information to raise awareness and to help people learn simple BSL phrases and communication tips to ensure everyone is included. <https://rnid.org.uk>

If you are a BSL user and you need to contact Croydon Council, you can do so using SignLive for free.

<https://www.croydon.gov.uk/signlive>

Doorstep Crime Advice Leaflet

Croydon Council Trading Standards is supporting The National Trading Standards Scams Team, by supplying the latest Doorstep Crime Awareness leaflet in the languages most spoken across Croydon. We want to help even more members of our community take a stand against scams and be aware of this crime.

We have some printed copies of the awareness leaflets, in English, Gujarati, Polish, Portuguese, Tamil and Urdu, available from our office, or if you are able to download this resource yourself here is the link:

www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk/resources-and-materials.

You can also learn more from a free online interactive session which helps further raise your awareness of scams and help protect you & your loved ones from these crimes. This training is available in British Sign Language as well as an accessible version for people with a learning disability.

Once completed, you will not only receive a certificate, but you will be armed with the knowledge to confidently speak with your friends and family about scams, and the devastating effects these frauds can have on people in our communities. Take the training here:

<http://www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk/become-a-friend/Croydon>

Was this bulletin helpful?

Contact Trading Standards to request a free door sticker advising cold callers that they are not welcome. If you are a victim of scam mail, contact us to receive a free copy of our toolkit on how to avoid falling victim and how to stop the letters.

Additionally, please let us know what you think of this bulletin and what Trading Standards topics you would like to see covered in future editions.

Contact Trading Standards:

Tel: 020 8407 1311

Email: trading.standards@croydon.gov.uk

Citizens Advice Consumer Service:

Tel: 0808 223 1133

Web: www.citizensadvice.org.uk