

SCAMS AWARENESS UPDATE



Older Persons Scams Awareness & Aftercare Project

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Jolly 'Green' Giant Frauds

How to spot and avoid eco-friendly scams.

Many of us may remember the laughing Jolly Green Giant from decades ago, advertising a well-known vegetable. Nowadays, 'Green' is more about combating the global warming crisis. The COP26 summit, held in the autumn last year, brought it more to people's minds, with many looking to 'go green' as a result.

When we see a crisis, we look to see how we can help; but when fraudsters see a crisis, they look to see how they can make giant money. 'Going green' is no different.

Greenwashing is a form of marketing spin in which green marketing claims are deceptively used to persuade the public to buy 'greener' products. Fraudsters use these, along with current events around energy efficiency, to trick people into buying goods and services that either are not what they say they are, or don't even exist.

This month, we look at how to spot and avoid such scams.

Remember, if you live in the northern part of Cheshire East, our Scams Awareness and Aftercare Project offers scams awareness talks to older people's groups and individuals. We can also support you if you have been a victim of a scam. We can be contacted on 01625 612958 or enquiries@ageukce.org.



Who is vulnerable to greenwashing fraud?

Anyone looking to do their bit for the environment could be susceptible to these types of fraud. So, if you're interested in reducing waste, your carbon footprint or wanting to be more eco-friendly, that could be you. With rising fuel and living costs, we're all vulnerable to energy efficiency frauds, as we try to save money.

Here are a few to look out for:

Government grant fraud - You may be contacted with the offer of a government grant to pay for installation of loft/cavity insulation, low carbon heating or draught proofing. They may even offer to complete application forms for you. Over the years there have been several legitimate government grant schemes, but fraudsters trick victims into signing up for work in their homes, only to find, once it is completed, that they weren't eligible for any government grant.



Energy efficiency fraud - These can arrive by flyers through the door, phone calls, emails or doorstep callers. Fraudsters offer a range of services which are either not needed or are of poor quality. Some include [offering a free health check for the solar panels, selling an optimiser or voltage optimiser for your panels, or claiming the inverter needs changing](#). Others claim your current insulation isn't efficient or causes damp.

The fraudsters are banking on you not understanding what is needed to keep your home safe, warm and efficient.

Charity fraud - We often think that we're being green by donating clothes we no longer need to charity, so others can get use from them. Unfortunately, alongside legitimate charities, fraudsters set up their own 'charities', or impersonate well known ones. They sell our pre-loved items for their own gain, with many tonnes ending up in landfill abroad.



Fake organic and eco-friendly products - from organic carrots to eco-friendly shampoo; sometimes it can seem that going green isn't cheap. Fraudsters play on the emotion of us wanting to help, but on a budget.

Through misleading labelling or advertising, they claim products are more eco-friendly than they really are. Not only does this mean you're buying products against your principles, it also means the products could be fake or dangerous.



Be proactive, not reactive - Don't respond to cold calls, doorstep callers, leaflets through the door, emails or adverts with offers too good to be true.

"Take 5" to think about it. Plan home improvements and think about how you want to be more environmentally friendly. This way, you are less vulnerable to being scammed.

Check certified schemes - The national [Green Homes Grant](#) stopped taking applications on 31st March 2021. Therefore, any offer of support through that scheme is not genuine.

Cheshire East Council and their partners offer a wide range of advice and information on energy efficiency, insulation grants and offers, switching energy suppliers, managing fuel debt, renewable energy, and much more. They can be contacted via their [website](#), at warm@cheshireeast.gov.uk or by calling 0300 123 5017 (option 4)



Don't be misled by false claims - If you're buying eco goods in shops, at markets or online, research the company you're buying from. The Competition and Markets Authority have [principles](#) businesses should follow when making environmental claims.

These include being truthful and accurate, clear, fair and substantiated.

Do your research - Fraudsters bank on appearing to know more than us about whatever they're trying to 'sell'. So, doing our research puts us in a stronger position.

Find out about the products and services you're interested in by contacting companies independently. Ask about how you can check their claims. For energy efficiency home improvements, always get several quotes from reputable traders.



Get organised - Fraudster will try to panic you into agreeing to something. Take time to organise paperwork from previous home improvements, grants and purchases, so you're in control of conversations about further improvements or maintenance.

Visit local charity shops to deliver donations, so they are more likely to be sold directly to consumers.

Report it

If an offer is too good to be true - it usually is! So it's best to report anything that doesn't sound right.

The types of fraud in this month's bulletin can be reported to Citizen Advice Customer Service, either [online](#) or by calling 0808 250 5050.



Here are some recent scams to look out for. Please share with family, friends and community.



Romance and befriending fraud

Missing loved ones around this valentine's month is a good reason to

talk to family and friends about befriending fraud.

Anyone can be looking for love or friendship, so *anyone* can be vulnerable to these scams.

Cheshire Police have noticed that recently bereaved people can be more at risk.

Check out our [top tips](#) for making new friends safely, from our May bulletin.



Council tax & Energy bills fraud

The Chancellor has announced government help with council tax

and fuel bills. Now you've read this bulletin, you'll see that this could be open to abuse.

We're awaiting more information about how the scheme will work. So in the meantime, be very cautious with calls, emails or texts about this. It's always best not to click on links in texts and emails, or give out personal information over the phone.

Contact the council or your energy provider independently to see if they've tried to contact you.



Local doorstep crime

We've had reports of doorstep crime in the Lyme Green

area of Macclesfield.

A man was trying to sell door to door & became aggressive when asked to leave.

One of our scams awareness volunteers reported it to the police on 101. This helped the police warn others in a [Cheshire Live article](#).

Revisit our [October bulletin](#) to remind yourself about how to keep safe at home.



Fake WhatsApp messages to grandparents

We've highlighted fake text messages to parents before,

about a change of mobile number.

This has now moved onto the WhatsApp messaging facility. The message starts with "Hey Nan" (or something similar) and eventually asks for money because they've lost their phone and wallet and have an emergency.

Never take such a message on face value. Call the person on a number you already have for them and speak to them directly.

COMING NEXT TIME

- Current fraud alerts
- Investment fraud

Though we don't like to see you leave, you can unsubscribe from these bulletins by emailing sally.wilson@ageukce.org

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