

Bogus Selling Techniques

West Yorkshire Trading Standards have received a number of complaints from schools in the West Yorkshire area who have been targeted by bogus selling techniques. Their advice is:- **If your school has been duped into such contracts, please contact your legal department within the council for further advice/guidance.**

The scenarios below have been sent to us by the schools in Leeds, West Yorkshire Trading Standards and Hertforshire Council

Job adverts

Schools who have placed job adverts in national newspapers are then targeted– A phone call is received by the school advising that the school has contracted with the trader and the advert needs to be checked and signed off. Teachers have been duped into thinking they have been dealing with the newspaper where they have placed the advert, to find that an invoice is then received by the school for an advert in a random publication, for the sum of up to £1000.

This is similar to the experience that was brought to our attention by **Hazel Millichamp from Victoria Primary School.....***'the Head had a call from Holbeck Police (that's who they said they were) to see if we wished to put an ad in their newsletter saying that we thanked the police for their help in the community. The Head said this was fine. I then had a call asking for the finance department asking me for invoice details for an ad the Head had agreed to place. They were very keen to get off the phone when they realised they had been rumbled!*

They then rang back last week to thank us for our support! Again they were very quick to get away when I said we had not agreed to any such thing.....and also from Maria Lavin from Cross Flatts Primary School Our Headteacher spoke to someone on Weds (21st Apr), and was led to believe that the school had placed an advert with them last year and that it was £199.99, but if she committed to it today, we could have it for £149.99.

Since that initial conversation, a man called Philip Smith has phoned several times, asking for Nicky our Headteacher, advising that they'd spoken to her already and she knew what it was about.

When Phil Smith rang again today, I asked what it was they dealt with and was given the answer the Police. He was reluctant to give me a phone number, saying he was on the phone all the time and would call back later.

This afternoon, a man called Oliver rang. The call was passed onto the Headteacher, who was now aware that no advert had previously been placed. When she pressed him for a phone number so she could verify which police station it was in support of, he promptly put the phone down on her.

Supplies for schools

Similar to the above but a phone call is received asking for example:- to check the stationary order. A fax is usually received and the school asked to sign and fax back. Again schools have been duped into thinking they are dealing with their usual supplier. An invoice is then received by the school charging extortionate prices for stationary products.

Educational Materials

A phoncecall offering free educational materials for 14 days. Unless the school cancels within the 14 days free period, they can find themselves tied into a contract with the trader for 1 year.

Free on-line educational materials – teachers go on to the websites, click yes to the terms and conditions (which is where the contract is formed). Schools have been charged up to £250 per visit to such websites. This is similar to the experience Denzil Francis at Royds had.....*'we are wondering if you can use your news letter to warn other schools about PDC and affiliated companies. It seem as if anyone can go to their web site insert a school post code and name, in order to view their material the school can end up being liable for a large subscription charge. We wouldn't want this to happen to other schools'* The school had to involve the legal department to solve this one.

Electric testing

Traders phoning the school up advising that they are from the council and the school is due to have their electric equipment PAT tested. The trader either makes an appointment or turns up unannounced to carry out testing. The school is subsequently invoiced for work, or for ongoing maintenance contracts which have apparently been agreed in the initial telephone call to the school.

Repair of Potholes - UK Roadways

A school has been approached by a company, UK Roadways, who were apparently repairing a pothole in the road outside the school. This company offered to repair the potholes in the school drive with 'any left over tarmac' when the school enquired as to the price then they were told that they could not give a price but the school would be invoiced later. Requesting payment by cheque.

Once the school decided that it did not want the service the contractors packed up the machinery and left without repairing the road outside the school.

WARNING Renewable Energy Installations and Electricity supply deals

This was circulated by Hertfordshire County Council:

A number of energy companies are approaching schools directly offering to install renewable energy technology in return for a contract to supply "cheap" electricity.

Schools have been offered solar photovoltaic panels "free of charge" in return for a 23 year contract to buy cheap electricity from a company associated with the installer. The school agrees to buy about 7% of its electricity from this new

supplier. Typically the fine detail in the installation and energy supply contract locks the school in with punitive default conditions.

The advice from the Herts Property Facilities Management Team is not to sign up to any of these deals at the present time but to seek specialist advice.

Consumer watchdogs are investigating the claims being made by solar technology sales people. They rarely live up to energy saving estimates given. The technology around long term use of solar PV panels is still developing and customers should avoid getting locked in to long-term contracts.