



NEWS RELEASE

Media contact: Amy Weiser on 0121 345 1006 or 07778160808

CCWater04/08

30 January 2008

GIVE BOGUS CALLERS THE BOOT

The Consumer Council for Water is calling for consumers to be extra vigilant this winter against distraction burglars or bogus callers, criminals who pretend to be from a utility company or other organisation to trick their way into a home and rob it.

Dark afternoons and evenings at this time of the year can leave people feeling particularly uneasy when someone unexpectedly comes knocking, but the Consumer Council for Water is suggesting steps homeowners should take to help protect themselves against bogus callers.

According to the Home Office, there were approximately 12,000 reported bogus caller incidents in 2007, and roughly half of the impostors stated some connection with 'the Water Board.'

Although thieves may show up on the doorstep posing as water workers, water company employees will try whenever possible to make an appointment before visiting a home.

Be especially wary of anyone saying that they are from 'the water board' as there are no water boards, only water companies and a true water company employee will name the water provider, and carry a company identification card.

Before opening the door to any stranger, stop. If the door has a chain, use it, and ask to see a form of identification. Have the visitor hand their identification through the door or letter box, and call the water company to confirm that the visit is legitimate and the identification is not a fake. A genuine water company employee will happily wait while the necessary checks are made. If unsure, don't open the door!

If the visitor claims to have left the identification card at home or in their vehicle turn them away. If he or she becomes aggressive at any time, keep them outside your door and immediately call 999.

Customers who would feel safer with an extra layer of protection against bogus callers are encouraged to register a password with their water company.

All water companies have password schemes available in which the customer can choose his or her own password. Some companies' password schemes have provisions for deaf and blind customers.

Dame Yve Buckland, National Chair of the Consumer Council for Water, said: "This is a particularly disturbing crime because it deliberately targets the weak and vulnerable. Victims of these crimes are most likely to be older people who live alone.

"People need to understand that they are entirely within their rights to turn a visitor away if they feel uncomfortable or are unsatisfied with the information presented. No water company will insist on entry to your home, and if the reason for the visit is necessary, the water company can find another way to let you know so that they can carry out the work."