

The Oasis Centre - Cornwall

Registered Charity Number 1139355, founded to serve the communities in the parishes of St Columb Major, St Mawgan-in-Pydar, St Eval and St Ervan



Looking Out for Surprise Bargains

Number 24 in a series of notes on important issues.

Everyone likes a bargain. As a result, the world of marketing has become a science and we are bombarded constantly with special offers, sales, discounts, two for the price of one and countless other devices to encourage us to spend our money. Criminals know this and have developed their own ways by which to profit from this human instinct.

A lady was walking home, when a man in a van stopped her and asked if she would like to buy an orthopaedic mattress – or two if she wanted. The man claimed he was from a bedding shop and was delivering them to buyers that couldn't take them, so he could sell them for a lot less than their retail value. Police advise that this is a common scam. The mattresses are old and worn and just repackaged to look new. They are unlikely to meet fire standards.

There are dozens of these scams. A common story is that the van driver has been to an exhibition or trade show and, quite by chance, has carpets, leather jackets, paintings, TVs, you name it, left over and available at bargain basement prices. Another variant of this scam involves a man knocking on your door with tarmac left over from a job he has been doing nearby or something a neighbour of yours has ordered but now does not want.

Police report that, in one case, TVs were sold from the back of vans in car parks. The sales actually involved real TVs not, as can happen, empty boxes with bricks inside. The TVs were however all broken. The scammers bought nice looking, ex-hire TVs that were broken. Their marketing ploy was that the TVs were top of the range (true) but that they were stolen – so no questions could be asked and they were really cheap – a £2,000 TV being sold for £100. People accepted the 'excuse' for a bargain and flocked to buy them. When they realised it was a scam, they found it difficult to complain as they had knowingly purchased stolen property.

These scams can pop up in all sorts of places. A well-dressed man, in a smart car and with a foreign accent approached two ladies and told them he was flying out of Heathrow and needed to sell some knives that he had in the boot of his car because he was unable to take them with him. Similar approaches involving the same attempted scam (and possibly the same man) were reported from other places. Victims, who paid large sums, discovered the knives were all of poor quality. Some fraudsters using the same ploy have been known to offer other 'valuable' items such as gold jewellery for cash on the pretext that they have run out of petrol.

As with so many other frauds, if it seems an astonishing deal and almost too good to be true it is. We must try to avoid these expensive 'bargains'.

Jeremy Simmonds, Chair, The Oasis Centre - Cornwall