



iCAN up and running at last!

Welcome to the second newsletter for members of Warrington's Consumer Alert Network. Since the last issue in July we have resolved the technical difficulties which were preventing us from going live with the system. A number of messages have now been sent firstly using voice messages and texts. More recently a final problem relating to e-mails was sorted out and the most recent messages have also been sent by e-mail.

If you are not getting messages by any of the methods you specified please contact us on 01925 442678 so we can check that your details are recorded and set up correctly. Similarly, if you want to change any of your details, please call on the above number. Over the next few months you can look forward to more information coming from iCAN which will include: warnings about the latest con men targeting the town and topical consumer advice in the run up to bonfire night and Christmas.

We may also from time to time seek your help in passing information to us if you see or hear anything that causes concern. However it is important that when we do this you do not put yourself at any risk whatsoever in order to respond.

Confidentiality

Our database is secure and we will not share it, or sell it to any other organisation.

Advice pack

In the last newsletter we referred to an enclosed advice pack. Unfortunately we omitted to actually enclose it. However you will find the pack supplied with this newsletter and hope that you find the enclosed material of interest. If you feel that you are in a position to usefully distribute any of this material to friends, family, neighbours or community groups please contact us and we may be able to supply you with sufficient copies.

What's iCAN all about?

Members of the Warrington Consumer Alert Network receive information direct via their telephone, text or e-mail from Warrington Trading Standards. The information provided will vary but will generally be to warn of various sharp practices as and when they occur in Warrington, including the sort of so-called doorstep crime that is typically targeted at the most vulnerable people in the community.

Anyone can join and so far 366 people all over Warrington have done so. If you can share the information you receive with friends, family or neighbours then so much the better. If you get messages by e-mail maybe you could print off a few copies and distribute them. Our phone number is on every message so that if anyone who sees it wants to join they know who to contact. There is plenty of room for more members.

Tarmac and Block Paving Gangs

Since the last newsletter in July various areas in Warrington have been targeted by gangs calling at the door unannounced and offering to block pave or tarmac driveways and patios. Despite an initially very friendly and professional approach with callers smartly dressed and vehicles clean, new and liveried, some of these people have turned out to be really unpleasant and unscrupulous.

Anyone who expressed the slightest interest was promised a follow up visit to prepare a quote. What actually happened next in a number of cases was that a gang of workmen turned up and made short work of breaking up the existing driveway or patio and dumping the rubble on the road outside. Protestations from householders who opened their curtains in the morning to discover a gang of navvies already hard at work fell on deaf ears and some victims ended up being intimidated into paying four figure sums, in cash, for work. The final insult for those who ended up with a new patio or driveway in these circumstances was that the quality of work was so poor that the whole job will almost certainly need to be redone. The trader unsurprisingly was untraceable.

However the good news is that many residents who fell foul of this particular scam were assisted by the Police and Trading Standards and were saved from paying thousands of pounds for poor quality work despite some work already having been done. Police involvement in these incidents also resulted in the recovery of a number of stolen vehicles. Fortunately with the onset of autumn and wetter weather reports of this type of incident have ceased.

However the advice is to be extremely careful if you are approached on the doorstep by anyone offering to do work on your property.



Leather Suites for sale

The last few months has seen a number of reports about brand new leather suites being offered for sale in unusual circumstances around town. The cost is typically around £400 but the products supplied are not leather but plastic and are of atrocious quality.

As well as the quality issues it is quite possible that these suites also pose a significant safety hazard. Although sofas seen by Trading Standards carry labels that give information suggesting they comply with fire safety regulations, as far as Trading Standards can tell these labels have been copied and are meaningless.

A suite tested failed safety standards and produced highly dangerous fumes when ignited.

Remember...

- ✓ Always seek quotes from a number of reliable, recommended traders.
- ✓ Make sure you have full name and address details before agreeing work. Discuss how and when payment will be made.
- ✓ Use recommendations from friends, family or neighbours.
- ✓ In the current economic climate the best traders do not need to advertise and rarely need to go knocking on doors to get work.

If you get traders at the door offering to do work and you are remotely suspicious of their intentions please tell Trading Standards.

Eyes and ears

Sometimes we may ask for members to look out on our behalf and pass information to us. This can potentially provide us with very valuable information but... please don't ever put yourself at risk in order to gain information.

We have learned of two methods of selling.

The first is direct from a van on the street. Typically the van driver may appear to be lost or looking for an address and will engage a local resident in conversation either by accosting them in the street and asking for directions or by knocking on a door. He will then offer to sell a suite that he will claim he is unable to deliver. Suites are described as leather and worth as much as £2500. There may be a story about bankrupt stock or similar in order to explain the apparently low price. Inevitably the seller is untraceable once the purchaser discovers a problem.

These suites have also been offered on postcard type advertisements of the type often displayed on a customer notice board in supermarkets and may look like a private sale. Staff at Morrisons in Stockton Heath alerted Trading Standards to this method of advertising and investigations into who is selling these suites continue.

If you come across, or are offered any of these "bargain" suites don't buy one but please tell Trading Standards.

Feedback

We want to know what you think, particularly if you are not happy with any particular aspect of iCAN. Please contact us on 01925 442678.

Charity Clothing Collections

All of us are probably familiar with well known charities posting collection bags through the door requesting that householders donate unwanted clothing and other household items. However Trading Standards have received reports of a request for clothing made on a flyer posted through letterboxes in Warrington. There is a heavy inference that the clothing is being collected for charitable purposes but it is probable that items collected are in fact disposed of commercially to make money.

Be careful when responding to requests like this and, if it is important to you, satisfy yourself that the collector is genuine.

“Did I agree to that?”

An elderly resident in Latchford was recently conned out of £40 by a man who called on her door and told her she had agreed two months ago for him to do some fencing work for her. Despite having no recollection of agreeing any such thing she was persuaded to part with £40 in cash. No work was subsequently done but the man has continued to visit and telephone and request more money. Police and Trading Standards are investigating.

Look out for your neighbours, friends and family particularly where they may be more vulnerable to this type of con.

Spanish Speeding Fines

Been to Spain recently on holiday? Did you hire a car while you were there, or drive your own to Spain? If you did, the arrival of an official looking letter, apparently from the Spanish Authorities claiming you have committed some sort of traffic offence may seem plausible, even if your driving in Spain was exemplary.

The letter carries a crest and a reference number and details of an account into which 129 Euros should be paid. However details of the offence are not given and reports have been received from people who have not even been to Spain that they have received these letters.

If you get one of these letters don't pay, but contact Trading Standards.