

DOORSTOPPERS

SETTING UP

NO

COLD CALLING ZONES

(Trading Standards Document)

No cold caller zones

Quite simply, this is about local residents and communities having the confidence to say “NO” to uninvited salespeople and to warn rogue traders and cold-callers that they are not welcome.

Following successful trials, an information pack has been put together to help local communities set up their own cold-calling zones. The pack is divided into three sections and includes information on:

Section 1 What & Why

- Doorstep crime

Section 2 Getting started

- Key partners
- Funding
- Selecting an area
- Residents packs and information
- Launching a scheme

Section 3 Running the Scheme

- Basic crime prevention messages
- What to do if someone cold-calls
- Measuring success

WHAT AND WHY

DOORSTEP CRIME

This is the crime arising from doorstep callers, bogus workmen, high-pressure salespeople, bogus officials and distraction burglaries. It is now well established that distraction burglaries and rogue trading are interlinked – and all too often, the seemingly innocent doorstep seller is actually checking things out for a re-visit to carry out a burglary or distraction burglary.

Whilst this type of criminal behaviour can impact on anybody in any place, research shows that older people are particularly vulnerable, especially those living alone.

A national Trading Standards Institute survey involved feedback from 9,000 randomly selected households. The result showed

that nationally, 96% of people simply did not want doorstep cold-callers and nobody actually welcomed them.

The number of serious doorstep crime incidents reported to the police and trading standards services has grown significantly over the past few years. Incidents involving older people losing thousands of pounds are not unusual and what has become clear is that the response and support mechanisms of enforcement agencies has not kept pace with the skills and the organisation of the criminals.

GETTING STARTED

KEY PARTNERS

The support of partner organisations is essential to the success of this initiative. However, the level of commitment from partners will vary from area to area.

For local schemes to succeed, there will need to be a local champion (manager). This could be, for example, an enthusiastic Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinator, a community support officer, community support warden, or indeed anybody willing to give a little of their time to help their local community.

With the co-operation of local residents a scheme can be established without the support of official agencies such as trading standards service or the police, but far better that they be involved as they can make a major contribution to its success.

Community safety issues are high on the agenda for local councils and, in every area of the UK; councils will have policies and groups specifically dealing with local issues such as this. In many cases funds are available to support local initiatives and staff may be on hand to give help and support. However, support will be more likely for areas which have a problem with doorstep crime / distraction burglary. Listed below

are some of the key potential partners to contact when thinking about setting up a scheme.

Trading Standards.....The Trading Standards Service is part of your local Council. It is a criminal enforcement agency, but at the same time, works closely with communities and businesses to protect them from rogue traders. Trading standards is likely to be a key partner.

Police.....All police forces are committed to crime prevention through community policing. How they do this varies from one force to another. In addition, the police generally take a lead role in organising Neighbourhood Watch schemes.

Local Council.....Local councils are required by law to consider community safety issues in relation to everything that they do and as such, it will be very high on their priority list. A local council will be a key partner if only through its network of contacts and ability to influence others.

Local Councillors.....All areas will have local councillor, maybe more. Local councillors are elected by local residents. In some areas there could be a parish / town councillor, a district councillor and a county councillor – three different people. In others, particularly unitary, metropolitan and London Boroughs, there may only just be one councillor representing an area. Whatever the case, councillors can be very influential people and their support is important.

Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRP)...

These are high-level partnerships between councils, police and other agencies. They help establish crime policy and direction for their area (usually based on council areas). CDRP are a vital route to funding.

Community Safety Partnerships.....These are more local and hands on (although in some areas they are part of, or the same CDRPs). CSPs bring together many agencies with community safety roles and they have budgets to support local initiatives (contact through your local council).

Neighbourhood Watch.....Neighbourhood Watch is a well-established national scheme usually operated and managed through the local police, but delivered by local residents and volunteer Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinators. The organisation of Neighbourhood Watch makes this an ideal vehicle on which to deliver NO COLD CALLING ZONES.

FUNDING

It doesn't cost much to set up a NO COLD CALLING ZONE, but it does cost. In most cases there will be funds available from or through one or more of the partners in the section "Key Partners"

Obviously cost will vary depending on the size and organisation of the scheme, but at its most basic, the following provides a rough outline.

Street signs.....Approximately....£15
Door stickers.....Approximately £50 per 200
Information packs for residents.... Dependent on content, but likely to use existing leaflets and the information material – possibly cost of envelope and covering letter.

Initial letters to residents.....Copy and printing costs
Ongoing information to residents...Depending on what information and frequency.

SELECTING AN AREA

Ideally, the area should be relatively small (20-40 properties) and easily defined by its boundary, eg a street, cul de sac, small estate or a Neighbourhood Watch area. The most important thing is that the initiative has the support of the local residents. How this is achieved will depend on the local situation, but consultation with residents is a vital first step, not only to get consent (from the majority), but also to raise awareness of the issues and encourage community involvement.

It is known that the doorstep criminals will target particular properties, areas or residents. Older people, living alone, are especially vulnerable. Agencies, such as the Police and Trading Standards, will have reports, statistics and experience to help identify areas at risk and as such, make them a priority for establishing No Cold Calling Zones. This will be particularly important to gain support (and possible funding) from crime and Disorder Partnerships, Community Safety Partnerships or local councils.

Other local partners who may be keen to assist include:

Community wardens / community beat managers

Neighbourhood Watch

Parish Councils

Housing agencies

Tenants' associations

Age Concern / Help the Aged

Social Services

Home Improvement Agencies (accessed through local councils)

Citizens Advice Bureau

Faith organisations

STREET SIGNS

Fundamental to the success of the scheme will be to mark the areas boundaries with signs which clearly say that it is a “No Cold Calling” area.

These signs may be fixed to a lamppost, wall, etc, but not without the permission of the landowner or local council.

Signs saying No Cold Calling Zone are preferable to No Doorstep Sellers as the latter can perhaps be interpreted as not applying to callers for roof repairs, gardening work etc.

The local council highway department will be able to supply details of their street sign supplier, specifications, approvals required, likely to cost etc and they must be consulted/involved.

Where a No Cold Calling Zone is co terminus with a Neighbourhood Watch area, consideration should be given to placing the No Cold Calling message on the neighbourhood Watch plate/signs.

DOOR STICKERS

These have proved a useful way of deterring callers. On the outward facing side is a clear message such as “Doorstep sellers - you are not welcome”. On the other side (inward facing) is a simple crime prevention message and a contact number to call for help or report an incident.

RESIDENTS’ PACK AND INFORMATION

It is important that residents are engaged in the initiative and that they understand their role and how to deal with uninvited callers.

There are a number of ways in which this can be done, including 1 to 1 personal visits, group meetings or leaflets (preferably a combination of these; e.g. a personal visit to go through the

information material). Personal visits are very time consuming, but can be effective, especially when dealing with the harder to reach residents who are unlikely to attend a meeting or read through an information pack. Personal visits should preferably be made by someone who knows the resident and, if possible, by appointment. Great care must be taken to follow good doorstep calling procedures.

Group meetings are an ideal way of getting messages across, but difficult to organise and persuade residents to attend. If, however, there is an existing group (residents' association or similar), then this is worth considering, especially if a representative from the police or trading standards will attend.

It is for each area/organiser to decide what material to include in a residents pack, but the advice is "less is more", keep the message simple and short.

Following suggestions

Covering letter (see www.doorstepcrime.com under No cold calling zones

Door stickers

Trading standards/ DTI leaflet

Police/Home office leaflet

Contact details of organiser and how to report an incident

"No cold calling" card to hand to any callers.

LAUNCHING THE SCHEME

A high profile public launch will help raise awareness and encourage support from both the public and partner organisations. If possible, a formal should be arranged with invited guests including key players, local councillors and local newspapers. The launch should be located within the area or near by and local residents invited. Perhaps it could run alongside a coffee morning or luncheon club or arranged at a community hall or similar venue. Attendees should be persuaded to make a short speech to formally launch the scheme.

It is important that the local press are involved and as such, you should think about providing a staged photo opportunity and tell the press when and where you are doing this. The press like a photograph of 'real people', so if you have willing, older residents then better than a line of dark suited officials! If your local council/police are involved, then they will have professional press officers and it's important that they are kept informed as they will probably issue a press release and deal with the local media on your behalf.

RUNNING THE SCHEME

BASIC CRIME PREVENTION MEASURES

An essential part of the scheme is to educate local residents about how to deal with cold callers and to give them the confidence to say No. Basic crime prevention and security issues such as the use of door chains/bars and checking Ids vital. In the national Trading Standards Institute survey (9,000 householders) only 13.4% of people reported asking for Ids, and only 1.3% ever checked them out. Even basic measures such as the use of door chains was disappointingly low with only 39.4% of households having one fitted and only 6.4% ever using them.

Basic advice can be found in leaflets produced by the Home office, DTI, Police and Trading Standards. Most of these can be found on www.doorstepcrime.com under information materials. Better still; ask a local trading standard or police officer to help produce a basic advice package for residents.

An important element of the scheme will be to persuade residents to fit or have a door chain/bar or mirror fitted. These things cost very little, but can be very effective if residents can be persuaded to use them. It may be that one of the partners will be able to help with the supply, or even the fitting of such equipment to older peoples homes. For details of Doorstep

security equipment see www.doorstepcrime.com under Doorstep Security Equipment

IF SOMEONE COLD CALLS

The system for dealing with incidents where sales people cold call within a No Cold Calling Zone will vary, dependant on the scheme, partners and resources available.

The scheme should give householders the confidence to say No and direct the cold caller out of the area. One way of doing this is to give residents small cards to hand to any caller explaining that they are in a No Cold Calling Zone and that they do not buy from doorstep sellers. The advantage of this is that it is less confrontational and doesn't need anything to be said. (for e.g. see www.doorstepcrime.com under No Cold Calling Zones)

Ideally cold callers should be reported either to the local champion or directly to the trading standards service/police depending upon pre-arranged local agreements. In some areas, systems have been arranged for somebody to attend to speak to the caller and support the householder. In some cases this is impractical, but if, for example, there is a locally sited community warden or sheltered housing supervisor then this could be an option. However the local scheme is operated, a trigger plan should be produced to advise householders about what to do, giving the necessary information and telephone contact numbers.

Irrespective of whether trading standards officers or police can make an immediate response, it is essential that where cold callers have been identified there is at least some follow up action. One option is for somebody (preferably an official agency) to contact the person/business pointing out that they made a call in a No Cold Calling Zone, and insisting on future compliance. (For example of letter see www.doorstepcrime.com under NO Cold Calling Zone). Whilst such letters can be sent

from the local schemes champion, it will carry much more weight if it has the support of partners, police, trading standards, or at least, includes their logo or refers to them.

MEASURING SUCCESS

If the scheme has the support (and in particular, funding) of official partners such as the police, trading standards or the crime and disorder partnership, then almost certainly, they will wish to measure its success, not only to make sure that it's working, but also to encourage on-going commitment and support to the concept. One of the things which they might want to measure is whether, whilst successful for that particular area, it has merely moved the problem elsewhere.

Whatever the case, it is worth talking to the main partners before the launch to ensure that systems are in place to measure the success of the scheme in a way which they want.

For an example of residents evaluation form see www.doorstepcrime.com under No Cold Calling Zones

Details of monitoring, developing action plans and evaluating crime reduction strategies can be found on www.crimereduction.gov.uk/aud05.htm