

NEWS RELEASE

POOR QUALITY DAMP-PROOFING

West Yorkshire Trading Standards Service is today issuing a warning about the sales tactics of a damp-proofing company operating in the region. Officers are currently investigating the activities of the company following a number of complaints received via Consumer Direct, from worried West Yorkshire residents.

The strategy the company uses to con people tends to be same, regardless of the individual they target. Prospective consumers receive an unsolicited telephone call from a salesperson, who explains that the company are prepared to carry out a free survey on the house to establish whether it is likely to be suffering from any damp-proofing problems. Should the householder agree to this, then arrangements are made for a 'surveyor' to visit to inspect the property. In the vast majority of instances, the 'surveyor' identifies that work is required on the damp proof course, whether or not this is, in fact, correct. At this stage, the householder is informed by the 'surveyor' that there are workmen in the area who could begin work on the identified defects as soon as possible. The householder may feel pressured into agreeing to have the work carried out, without being able to obtain second opinions, or quotes from other companies for the work. In the cases reported to Trading Standards, workmen from the company tend to arrive either the same day or the next morning to begin the task. Work could be substandard, and the homeowner may be charged an extortionate amount for the job undertaken. In circumstances where the consumer is unhappy to pay the amount subsequently charged, the workmen may use 'strong arm' tactics to ensure payment is made.

Trading Standards Officers are advising members of the public who receive unsolicited calls from a company in relation to damp proofing surveys to be wary of committing themselves to work without first ensuring the legitimacy of the offer.

Graham Hebblethwaite, West Yorkshire's Chief Trading Standards Officer warned consumers: "My advice to West Yorkshire home-owners is not to trade on the doorstep and to be wary of unsolicited calls. Although many reputable companies also canvass people over the telephone, consumers should always be on their guard and shouldn't agree to any work before having had time to think about it first. In any case, if the initial contact was made by the trader, then consumers should be given a cooling off period, prior to any work commencing."

Councillor Keith Wakefield, of the Trading Standards Committee said “West Yorkshire Trading Standards has already saved West Yorkshire residents from parting with substantial amounts of money to this company for substandard work. If you receive an unsolicited phone call from a company selling damp proofing, Trading Standards would be very interested to know. Call Consumer Direct on 08454 04 05 06 to report information and obtain pre-shopping advice before you buy.”

Trading Standards offer the following tips to consumers thinking of embarking on household maintenance or improvements:

- If you are looking for a tradesman, there are schemes in the area such as the Trust Mark Scheme, which provide information on reputable, vetted tradespeople. Call Consumer Direct on 08454 04 05 06 for more information.
- Ask around – word of mouth is the best form of recommendation and your friends and relatives could provide the best source of information on whether a trader’s standard of workmanship is satisfactory or not.
- Ask the trader for previous references, and follow them up.
- Work out how much you are willing to spend, but keep this information to yourself – don’t give it to any potential traders.
- Be clear what work you want carried out and get several quotes. Remember that the cheapest quote is not necessarily the best.
- Avoid paying cash upfront and ask for a fully itemised receipt.
- It may be worth paying by credit card, especially if the work will cost over £100, as the credit card company may be jointly liable with the supplier if you discover problems.

NOTES TO EDITOR

Principal Officer: Paul Smith 0113 2898 219

Divisional Officer: David Lodge 0113 2898 243