

Notice Fraud: Christmas 2020



The festive season is rife with fraudsters looking to take advantage of us opening our wallets and feeling merry. Here are some things to watch out for:

HMRC Scam

HMRC is aware of an automated phone call scam which will tell you HMRC is filing a lawsuit against you, and to “press one to speak to a caseworker to make a payment”. HMRC has confirmed this is a scam and you should end the call immediately. This scam has been widely reported and often targets elderly and vulnerable people (Source: Gov.uk).

Jury Service

Reports have been received about a Jury service scam that has been operating since Covid-19. The warning has been raised over scam texts demanding the public perform jury service or pay to postpone it.

The scam also states that members of the public may be fined if they do not reply to an official jury summons. This may provoke panic in those who receive this fake message.

A real summons will ask you to confirm whether or not you can go and to explain your reasons for being unavailable. You will never be asked to pay money to postpone your service. (Source: Trading Standards).

Counterfeit goods

Looking to buy a loved one a present from a well-known brand this Christmas? Stay vigilant for counterfeit goods.

These can range from poorly made t-shirts with rip-off logos to electronics which could break after one use or even be dangerous.

This year, a specialised Europol unit shut down 20,520 websites for illegally trading counterfeit merchandise online. (Source: Which?)

Charity scams

As the season of giving gets well underway, people often donate to charitable causes. Stay vigilant to fraudsters as this can create new opportunities for scammers.

Fraudsters hiding behind charities as a ruse tend to operate in two key ways: by creating a completely bogus charity, appealing for donations through a website or by utilising donation boxes and misusing a legitimate charity’s name, supposedly appealing on their behalf. Often the real charities will never see your donation. If you’re suspicious of street appeal volunteers, you can ask to see their official charity identification which they’re required to carry. (Source: Which?)

Christmas Online Shopping

Fraudsters are exploiting Christmas bargain-hunters who have switched to online shopping owing to current coronavirus restrictions.

People looking for games consoles, bicycles and clothing may be at a higher risk of encountering a scam, according to banking industry research. UK Finance, which represents the finance industry, warned of scams when items were never delivered.

The trade body said social media platforms, online marketplaces and auction websites were increasingly being used by criminals to carry out these purchase scams, where a customer pays in advance for goods or services that do not exist and are never received.

More than £27m was lost to such fraud in the first half of the year, according to UK Finance figures. (Source: BBC News)

Holiday scams

With the cold and dark weather upon us, a lot of us are starting to think about booking a holiday in the sun but there are criminals who want to exploit us.

The criminals have set up fake villa websites to try to trick you into paying down-payments or deposits for bogus holiday rentals.

One such scam reported to us this year was the Estate Luxury Home site which had hundreds of listings for holiday villas and appeared totally legitimate however the whole site was a scam and one of our members lost thousands of pounds.

Recent Cases

A former NHS Trust Director, who admitted to a charge of fraud by false representation after lying about having a degree, has been given a suspended sentence.

The 53 year old, who successfully applied for the role of chief information and digital officer at Oxford University Hospital stated that he had a classics degree. After an anonymous allegation was received, the Trust asked to see his degree certificate.

Despite several requests to produce the certificate he did not and instead deciding to resign from the Trust, after an investigation he was given a suspended sentence.

An investigation was undertaken into a member of staff who was alleged to have stolen a number of pieces of IT hardware from a company and subsequently sold them on eBay.

The company was not aware that any computers were missing and went on to conduct a full inventory audit. The subject was subsequently arrested, with all items of digital media in their possession, seized for forensic acquisition and analysis.

A full sales history of the subject, traced through eBay, showed many other sales of IT equipment. As the subject was responsible for the asset tracking of such IT equipment, it was very difficult to establish what was genuine Trust property. (Source: NHSCFA)

rsmuk.com

A woman who faked a cancer diagnosis to claim more than £45,000 in donations has been convicted of fraud.

Nicole Elkabbas, 42, set up an online fundraising campaign, claiming she needed money to pay for private treatment for ovarian cancer, police began an investigation after a doctor, who had recently given her the all-clear, raised suspicions.

Elkabbas, of Broadstairs, Kent, pleaded not guilty and told Canterbury Crown Court she had believed she had cancer. Judge Mark Weekes said Elkabbas had been convicted on "clear and compelling evidence" and should expect a custodial sentence. (Source: BBC)

Reporting concerns

Don't be embarrassed to report a scam. Fraudsters are cunning and clever; there is no shame in being deceived. By reporting, you will make it more difficult for them to deceive others.

It is easy to report fraud, bribery or corruption affecting the NHS.

Contact your Local Counter Fraud Specialist (LCFS) directly or call the national anonymous, 24-hour reporting line on 0800 028 4060 (powered by Crimestoppers). You can also report online, completely confidentially via <https://cfa.nhs.uk/reportfraud>.

It is the LCFS' role to take every allegation of fraud or bribery seriously and to provide anonymity and confidentiality for anyone who reports a concern. It is recommended that you refer to your organisation's policy on fraud when reporting allegations for further information on how you are protected.

When making a referral please provide as much information as possible, for example:

- the name of the person who you believe has committed a fraud;
- when and where the fraud has taken place;
- how long the fraud has been going on; and
- any details to substantiate your suspicion.

**Remain vigilant during this festive time.
Spot it. Report it. Together we stop it.**

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