

# WatchOut

December 2014

Community safety news for Essex

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## Police to target online fraud at Christmas-time

POLICE forces across the country want to keep you safe during the festive season and many are running 'The 12 online frauds of Christmas' campaign to protect thousands of people in the community from falling victim to cyber-fraudsters.

The campaign aims to raise awareness of a dozen online frauds that have the potential to ruin your festive fun.

Working in partnership with the City of London Police, which is the National Policing Lead for Fraud, begin by shining a light on the 'do's' and 'don'ts' of online shopping.

So far in 2014 74 per cent of all adults nationwide have bought goods or services online, and this December around 50 per cent of UK citizens are expected to use the internet to buy more than half of their Christmas presents.

The good news is the majority of people will still have presents delivered to their doorstep or into their email account without a hitch.

However, the sad reality is there will also be tens of thousands of people whose Christmas will be damaged, and in some cases destroyed, after finding out they have fallen foul of heartless criminals who specialise in tricking internet users with the promise of great online deals and big cash savings.

Throughout the 12 days of Christmas 37 local police forces and a range of public and private sector organisations will flag up the threat of 10 more online festive frauds, identified by the City of London Police's National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB). **These are the 12 frauds police will be concentrating on:**

- Online shopping fraud
- Christmas e-cards
- Auction fraud
- Holiday fraud
- Loan and investment scams
- Ticketing fraud
- Donating to charity
- Mobile malware/malicious apps
- Money transfers
- Social media scams
- Dating/romance scam
- Mobile payments

More internet safety advice at [www.get-safeonline.org](http://www.get-safeonline.org) and [www.cyberstreetwise.com](http://www.cyberstreetwise.com) or contact Action Fraud on 0300 123 040.

## Fake goods can be bad for health and wealth

**THIS is the time of the year when we all look forward to Christmas Day and the surprise when we open our presents.**

But how would you feel if the surprise you bought for your loved on turned out to be nothing more than a cheap fake?

Well the chances of that happening are extremely high at Xmas because this is when the crooks flood boot sales and markets with cheap, shoddy counterfeit goods.

What makes this practice even more sickening is that many of the goods could be potential killers.

Trading Standards officers across the country have found that many of these fake are being sold on popular social media sites like Facebook so be on your guard.

They have discovered Ugg boots being sold online, fake perfume, counterfeit Frozen dolls, illicit wine and spirits and much more.

Stephen Maunder, consumer engagement officer for Norfolk Trading Standards, said: "If you are thinking of buying items, particularly designer goods on these Facebook groups or other sites, then approach with caution.

"Do your homework - just think 'is this going to be genuine?' and 'can I contact the seller if there is a problem?'"

He added that if something looked to good to be true, it probably was.

"Consumers have fewer rights when they buy privately," said Mr Maunder. "It's a case of buyer beware. The only rights you have are that the goods must be 'as described'. But this can be difficult to prove."

He said there had been a rise in people selling on local Facebook groups.

"Originally, a lot of it was through eBay, but they tightened up, then it was Gumtree and they

tightened up, so people have moved on again," he said. "There are no charges for selling on Facebook groups and there are no controls. Anyone can set up a group and quite often, you don't even know the real name of the person you are buying from."

### Why should you avoid counterfeit goods?

You're helping the trader to break the law and many fraudsters use the proceeds from selling counterfeit goods to fund drug dealing or other types of organised crime.

Buying fake goods contributes to job losses

because genuine manufacturers are unable to match prices charged by rogue traders. You're also depriving the genuine manufacturers of any profit. Some counterfeit goods may be substandard, possibly dangerous and may even contain hazardous substances.

### Protect yourself against fake goods fraud

If something seems too good to be true, eg a Rolex watch being sold for £10, it probably

is. Don't be fooled into thinking you're getting a great deal.

Always examine the quality of any goods you're thinking of buying and check the labels to see if they are genuine.

It's often very easy to spot a fake as their labels may have spelling mistakes or other distinguishing marks.

Always ask the trader you're buying from whether they offer an after-sales service, or a guarantee. Most rogue traders won't.

Anyone wanting to report any goods for sale online or who needs help with buying from websites should contact the Citizens Advice Bureau Consumer Service hotline on 08454 040506 or Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040.



Make sure you record the IME numbers of your mobile phone so you can block it if it is stolen

## Stay safe this Christmas

By Peter Faulkner

**FOR many, the holiday season is a fabulous time of year, with friends, family and loved ones close at hand to enjoy the festive fun.**

Don't allow this to be ruined, so read the following simple tips from Essex Police that will ensure that you keep yourself and your property safe.

**AT HOME** – Having bought your presents, don't make it easy for someone to steal them. When you are out make your house appear occupied (i.e. lights on timers, radio on), make sure your house, gates and shed/garage are secure and if storing drink or other items in an out building don't put in public view.

Don't leave presents under the Christmas tree in view from outside, and after Christmas don't advertise your new goods by displaying the boxes for collection in front of your house, turn the boxes inside out or tear them up or bag them.

**WHILST OUT SHOPPING** – If you have left buying your Christmas presents to the very last minute or you are awaiting those January sales make sure thieves do not find it

easy to help themselves to the contents of your handbag.

Leaving a handbag on the back of a chair, in a trolley, or a purse sitting in an open bag, a wallet in the back pocket, a mobile phone on the table in a restaurant is a calling card or thieves to steal. Don't make it easy for the thief. If it's a crowded place or where you are distracted you are more at risk.

**IF YOU GO OUT** - The holiday season is the time to "Eat, drink and be merry", but whilst out don't make yourself vulnerable by drinking too much. Make sure that someone knows where you are going and when you will be back home. Plan your journey ahead and don't wander off on your own.

**BOXING DAY** - Take time to record the serial numbers of your new gifts, from the new Ipad, Ipad, laptop, mobile phone, TV to garden equipment. You can record serial numbers free of charge at [www.immobilise.com](http://www.immobilise.com) and there are a number of property marking products available like indelible pens, SelectaDNA, SmartWater, CRE mark by CRE products to name but a few.

With the new mobile phone make a note of the IME number of a mobile phone. To find it

key in \*#06#, and with this you can block it if it's stolen. On many mobile phones you can download an "App" to find your phone and more importantly wipe that data stored on it, check your "App store" or phone provider.

**If you see anything suspicious please contact Essex Police with as much detail as possible. It is very unusual for any person to call at your door and then start to walk round the side or back of your property. So remember...**

1. If you have a house alarm – USE IT at every available opportunity.
2. Be extra careful when locking doors and windows and ensure that with UPVC doors you remember to lift the handle and use your key to lock it properly.
3. Take time to consider the location of your keys and valuables: Ensure that your keys are not within reach through the letterbox and that key, wallets, phones and handbags are kept in a safe location.

For more advice on how to make your home more secure and ways to enjoy the Holiday season, visit the Essex Police website [www.essex.police.co.uk](http://www.essex.police.co.uk)

