

Stopping the criminals

Reducing the number of distraction burglaries committed within Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Worcestershire is a priority for West Mercia Police.

The force is working hard to raise awareness of the security measures people should take before they let anyone into their home, or ask them to do maintenance work.

We also work closely with Trading Standards, who have produced a banking protocol which encourages bank and building society staff to be alert to older customers making unusually large cash withdrawals. This protocol was introduced in response to offences where vulnerable people were persuaded to make substantial and unjustifiable cash payments to bogus tradespeople.

To ensure that more people committing distraction burglaries are brought to justice, the force has established a specialist team to investigate incidents and to target suspects and known offenders.

Local communities can help by looking after the most vulnerable members of society and reporting anything suspicious they see in their neighbourhood.

Contact the police:

0300 333 3000

www.westmercia.police.uk

If you would prefer to give information anonymously, call Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

How you can help

Friends, neighbours and people who have regular contact with older and vulnerable people can help them to make their lives more secure.

Research shows that fewer distraction burglaries are committed in areas where there is a supportive community. You can help by:

- Keeping an eye on people calling in the area or acting suspiciously.
- Noting the registration numbers of vehicles parked in your area for a period of time.
- Calling **0300 333 3000** to provide information to the police about suspicious people, activity or vehicles, however insignificant it may seem.
- Encouraging vulnerable people not to open the door if they are not expecting or do not recognise the person. If they open the door, remind them to secure the door bar or chain first and check the caller's identity carefully. **If in doubt, keep them out!**
- If a distraction burglary has taken place or been attempted, encourage the victim to report it as quickly as possible.
- Calling on vulnerable people regularly. If it is not too much trouble, help them keep their front garden tidy and find reliable tradespeople for any maintenance work that really does need to be undertaken.



**Knock
knock**

**Who's
there?**



policing
west mercia

Do you know who they are letting in?

Distraction burglary is an unpleasant crime. For the victims, often the older and most vulnerable in our communities, it can be very distressing.

A distraction burglary involves criminals tricking their way into a home by taking advantage of the trust shown to them by the occupier. A potential victim could be your neighbour, a friend or a relative.

West Mercia Police is determined to crack down on the people committing these offences. Local communities, carers and neighbours have an important role to play in helping us catch these criminals. Working together we can make the lives of vulnerable people safer and more secure.



Who commits distraction burglaries?

For some criminals, distraction burglary is a full-time activity. It's their job. They move around the country, usually in teams, targeting a different area before moving on.

Unfortunately they are very good at what they do. When they knock on a door they will use any excuse to gain entry. Frequently they will claim to be an official from a utility company, such as water, electricity or gas. Others will offer gardening or property maintenance services. Sometimes children as young as six are used to get into the house.

While one person distracts the homeowner, another will enter unnoticed to steal money and any valuable items they can find. These types of burglaries can take place at anytime. However, the majority of crimes occur in the afternoon with the peak time being between 12pm and 3pm.

Another group of criminals will try a different approach. Falsely presenting themselves as reputable tradespeople, they will undertake inferior maintenance and repair work (or sometimes no work at all) and demand very high fees. They put extreme pressure on their victims to obtain payment and will even go so far as to accompany them to banks and building societies while their victims make a cash withdrawal.

Who are the victims?

A distraction burglary can be committed against anyone but older and vulnerable people are more likely to be the victims of these crimes. Research shows that:

- 67% of victims are female
- 74% of victims live alone
- The average victim is 80 years old

Fortunately, the majority of victims, after the initial shock, make a full recovery. However for a small minority, those who are most vulnerable, the consequences can be very serious and long term.

The scale of the problem

Each year around 350 doorstep crime incidents are reported to West Mercia Police but we know that many crimes committed or attempted are never reported. Under-reporting occurs because victims are embarrassed, scared or simply initially unaware that a crime has been committed.

People who have been the victims of a distraction burglary or an attempted crime should always be encouraged to report the incident as quickly as possible to the police. The more information we have, the greater the chance that we will catch those responsible.