



COLIN'S BLOG - FESTIVE AWARENESS

FRIDAY 17TH NOVEMBER 2017

On the countdown to Christmas,
My true love said to me,
Close the curtains,
Lock the door,
Don't leave the presents
by the window on the floor,
Because we don't know
what the stranger saw.



BE AWARE OF THIS BEFORE YOU TRAVEL OR GO SHOPPING THIS CHRISTMAS TIME!

Last year, the Daily Mail and Mail on line, published this article which, with their agreement, was shared on social media: -

The tipping point at which cash will no longer be king is expected to come in 2021, when it is predicted 14.5 billion debit card payments will be made, overtaking the 13 billion cash payments forecast for the first time.

The device is thought to be the first sold on the black market to specifically target the increasingly-popular contactless bank card.

The following article is reproduced with acknowledgement and thanks to BT



Christmas may be a season of goodwill, but it's also a time when scammers try to take advantage of our generosity of spirit. Don't fall victim to these sneaky Christmas scams.

Gift scams

Each year there are 'must-have' gifts that shoppers scramble over each other to buy. Fraudsters realise this is a great opportunity to take advantage of your desperation, so be on your guard if you see links to competitions to win those goods or emails promising great discounts in your inbox or junk mail.

These may be phishing scams, designed to get you to reveal personal information or download malware. If a deal sounds too good to be true, it almost certainly is!

Auction scams

Working along similar lines, don't be duped by fake deals advertised on auction sites like eBay. Do your research on the seller before you even think about making a bid.

Otherwise you'll shell out for goods that are either a pale imitation of the real thing, or don't even exist.

Fake gift cards

Gift cards are always a popular gift, so you may see ads for hugely discounted gift cards on social media or in your inbox. But it could be from a third-party website that's selling fakes.

If you want to be sure, just get the gift card direct from the retailer or from a site that you know and trust.

E-Card viruses

These days many of us receive as many e-cards as we do actual Christmas cards through the post. They are more environmentally friendly, cheaper and often are more interactive and fun.

But they are also an easy way for scammers to send viruses or malware which may nab your personal information. So, if you don't recognise the email address of the sender, don't even open it.

Travel scams

The Christmas period is a time of travel for many of us, heading around the country – or even the globe – to meet up with our loved ones. And thus, it's a hugely expensive time to travel.

But don't let your hunt for a bargain on a flight or hotel room blind you to the fakers advertising deals that don't actually exist. Stick to reputable travel websites.

Charity scams

Many of us dip into our pockets to help out those less fortunate at this time of year. Fraudsters are wise to this, and have developed plenty of fake charity websites designed to steal your donations.

Make sure you are on the charity's legitimate website if you want to donate. Any donation page should have a URL beginning https: and show a padlock sign.

And make sure you ignore any requests to donate via Western Union or other money transfer firms.

Shipping notification scams

If you do a lot of your gift shopping online, there's a good chance that your inbox is full of order confirmations and shipping notification emails. Be on your guard for fake emails, designed to get you to 'confirm' your personal details for the retailer.

What they actually want is for you to provide the info scammers need to steal your identity.

Fake texts

Recent years have seen plenty of text message scams around the festive period. The scammers will send you a text claiming to be your bank or other financial firm, warning that your account will be locked unless you urgently confirm certain details.

They may even include the first few digits of your account or credit card as a way of convincing you.

No financial firm will ever ask for your details in this way. If you're concerned, contact your bank directly.

Malicious apps

If you're using your smartphone or tablet to try to secure those last few stocking filler bargains, be on your guard when downloading apps that promise to help you find the best deals. Only download apps from official channels like the Play Store or iTunes.

Otherwise you may be exposing your device, and your personal details, to the scammers.

Dating site scams

Dating sites can offer a great opportunity for fraudsters. They build fake profiles, where the profile includes links to malware. Or they may simply try to convince you to send money to help them out of some dire trouble. Never, ever send money to someone you don't know and trust.



Having reached the young age of seventy, and seen so many of my friends and colleagues, having to cope with serious illness, I realise that life is too short to be wasted, and that one should take every opportunity to enjoy it whilst you can, and to help others less fortunate, through the trials and tribulations that they face, often through no fault of their own.

We all know that life brings with it many challenges, some surmountable, others not, but, from an early age, I was taught to care, and where possible, to do the right thing. Sometimes one's efforts can backfire, but, in the main, people appreciate what I and others try to do.

This is where I bang the drum again, about the vital role that Neighbourhood Watch can play towards community cohesion, helping to keep areas safe from crime and disorder, looking out for, and helping elderly and vulnerable people.



Making sure that we arrived before 11am, my wife and I visited a retail park in Harlow on Saturday. Being brought up to be respectful, we both sat in silence, listening to the radio, in order to ensure that we did not miss the two minutes silence. I was saddened by the vast number of people who appeared to ignore this, but realise that, in our fast-moving world, many people were probably too wrapped up in their materialistic but blinkered lives, to spare a thought for those who gave their lives to secure a better future for the generations that followed their ultimate sacrifice. I wonder how many of those who passed by, actually bothered to pay their respects on Remembrance Sunday?

I can remember being on duty in Ongar High Street in the late 1970's, when I was asked to join the duty sergeant for a spot of traffic duty. As the eleventh hour approached, I was ordered to stop the traffic, and ask the drivers to kindly turn off their engines, so that the two minutes silence was observed by them, and, if the

drivers objected, or failed to comply, their ignition keys were confiscated, until the end of the observance. Now, that's what I call respect! Of course, if that were to happen today, it would be classed as exceeding one's powers, and denying the drivers of their 'Human rights!'



I try to avoid politics, however, I have spent a lot of time recently, hearing and reading about the antics of politicians. I must admit that the cross-party farces which are currently going on, (much of which one would normally expect and accept as kindergarten behaviour), fall far below the standards that one came to expect from the once popular 'Brian Rix farces,' which we came to enjoy on television. The latter, were of course, in the pursuit of entertainment, whereas, the behaviour from those who represent us in parliament, has more serious consequences, which could ultimately affect our reputation and our future on the world stage. The only wise words that I have read recently, stem from Sir James Dyson, who still seems to be on the same planet! Those in power need to get a grip, stop bickering, and deliver what the majority of people voted for!



FESTIVE AWARENESS – FIRE SAFETY By following 12 simple steps everyone can make sure that they and their families are safe and sound throughout the Christmas period to ring in the new year. Check your Christmas tree lights conform to the British Standard. Always use an RCD on outdoor electrical equipment (safety device that can save lives by instantly switching off the power).

Never place candles near your Christmas tree or furnishings. Don't leave them burning unattended.

Make sure your family and visitors staying for the festive period know what to do in an emergency. Practice a fire escape plan.

Decorations can burn easily - Don't attach them to lights or heaters.

Switch off electrical appliances when not in use, unless they're designed to stay on. Take special care with Christmas lights. Always switch off and unplug Christmas lights before you go to bed.

Celebrate Christmas and New Year safely. The risk of accidents, especially in the kitchen, is greater after alcohol is consumed.

Most fires start in the kitchen - never leave cooking unattended.

If you are planning to celebrate with fireworks, store them in a metal box, read the

instructions, never go back to a lit firework and keep a bucket of water nearby.

Make sure cigarettes are completely extinguished.

Check the battery in your smoke alarm every week and use Christmas as a reminder to clean it and remove dust.

Keep candles, lighters and matches out of reach of children.

Take the time to check on elderly relatives and neighbours this Christmas - make sure they are fire safe.

Christmas is a time to relax and have fun but it can also be very busy and stressful. You may be out and about more than usual – for that essential Christmas shopping and to festive parties and other social events – and the last thing you need is to become a victim of crime. To help avoid this, consider some of the following good advice from the Suzy Lamplugh Trust:-

Safety Tips for the Festive Season

Christmas Shopping

Don't get loaded down with too many bags. Try to keep one hand free.

Try and avoid taking young children into busy shopping areas. If it is unavoidable make sure they know what to do if they lose you, e.g. Tell the nearest counter assistant that they are lost and NEVER leave a shop without you.

Agree a meeting point with older children in case you get separated.

Be careful where you park your car, especially if you will be returning to it after dark.

If parking in a multi-storey car park, where possible, choose a well-lit space, as close to the exit as possible, and away from pillars. Reverse into position.

Keep car doors locked whilst driving in built up areas, especially if you've got bags of presents in the car.

Don't leave presents on show in a parked car as they could tempt thieves.

Keep alert and aware of your surroundings, especially in busy shops and crowded streets where thieves and pickpockets may well be operating.



Keep a close watch on your valuables and try not to keep them all in one place.

Christmas Parties

Most of us like a drink or two but remember that alcohol will affect your judgment – don't let it endanger your personal safety.

Remember, the most common date rape drug is alcohol, with victims being given drinks with a far higher alcohol content than they think.

Watch your drinks and food to ensure that nothing is added to them. Never leave your drink unattended, even if you are going onto a dance floor or to the toilet.

If your drink has been left unattended, do not drink any more of it.

If something tastes or looks odd, do not eat/drink any more of it. **Be aware though that some date rape drugs are colourless and tasteless.**

If someone you do not know or trust offers to buy you a drink, either decline or accompany them to the bar and watch that nothing is added to your drink.

Know your own limit.

If you meet someone new at a party, don't go home with them or invite them back to your home or accept a lift from them. Arrange a second date in a public place to get to know the person better.

Pay attention to your instincts. If you feel uneasy about someone, there may be a reason.

When it's time to go home, carry your keys, mobile phone and some money in your pocket, so you can give up your handbag or wallet and escape quickly if necessary on the way home. Avoid using a back trouser pocket (vulnerable to pick-pockets).

Transport

The party's over and you need to get home. You are likely to be tired and slightly the worse for wear so you need to be careful.

The ideal plan is to book your cab or taxi in advance or call a licensed cab company from the party and arrange for them to pick you up right outside the venue.

Never accept a lift from a minicab touting for trade. They are illegal and can be very dangerous.



Always sit in the back of a cab and if you get chatting to the driver, do not give away personal details. If you feel uneasy with the driver, ask him to stop at a busy familiar place and get out.



If using public transport, have your ticket, pass or change ready in your hand so that your wallet or purse is out of sight.

Always wait for the bus or train in a well-lit place near other people if possible and try and arrange for someone to meet you at the bus stop or station.

Take note of where the emergency alarms are and try to sit near them.

If a bus is empty or it is after dark, stay on the lower deck as near as possible to the driver.



On trains, avoid empty compartments or compartments that have no access to corridors or other parts of the train. If you feel threatened on any public transport press the alarm and/or make as much noise as possible to attract attention of your fellow passengers or the driver or guard.



CHILDREN IN NEED TONIGHT ON BBC TV



Here's a link to read about the latest scam involving What's App. Copy and paste: -

http://www.itpro.co.uk/mobile/29894/millions-download-fake-whatsapp-app?_mout=1&utm_campaign=itpro_newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter



Don't forget that you can also read my blog and get access to much more information at: -

<http://www.eppingforestnhw.org.uk/>

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Supporting Epping Forest, Brentwood & Harlow NhW. Advisor to London Community Watch

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