

Gloucestershire Constabulary is supporting a new national campaign to target burglars who trick their way into houses and target the elderly and vulnerable.

‘Not Sure?...Don’t Open The Door’ is the message at the heart of Operation Liberal’s public awareness campaign against distraction burglars.

The campaign, sponsored by the Energy Retail Association (ERA), aims to make people aware of the tactics used by distraction burglars and how they can prevent themselves from becoming potential victims.

A distraction burglary is defined as where one or more offenders trick or distract an occupant in order to gain entry to the premises before committing burglary.

Paul Francis, county Crime Prevention Officer for Gloucestershire Constabulary, said: “Distraction burglars can have a devastating impact on their victims. The elderly, who are most commonly the victims, are among the most vulnerable in our society and these offenders deliberately target them, leaving many with terrible physical and emotional injuries.

“This campaign is about raising awareness of these crimes and helping us to protect victims and tackle those who commit these terrible offences.”

As well as attempting to prevent distraction burglaries, Gloucestershire Constabulary is committed to tackling offenders and has had some notable successes.

For example, in June last year 26-year-old Mark Rhodes was sentenced to five years imprisonment after admitting to 69 distraction burglary and fraud offences committed across the UK. The investigation was led by Gloucestershire Constabulary.

The new awareness campaign is being launched in the East Midlands region, where Operation Liberal is based. All police forces in England, Wales and Northern Ireland co-ordinate the investigation of distraction burglaries through Operation Liberal, which is a national unit that analyses intelligence and maintains a database of crimes, offenders, vehicles, forensic information and images. This collaborative approach solves more crimes and leads to heavier sentences for criminals.

Operation Liberal works with many partner agencies including the Home Office, Water UK, Trading Standards, Crimestoppers and the Energy Retail Association who represent Great Britain’s major electricity and gas suppliers.

The campaign will see the roll out of posters to police forces which feature four elderly models and depict commonly used methods of distraction burglary. The posters will be placed at hearts of communities such as Post Offices, doctors’ surgeries, places of worship, community centres, bingo halls, charity shops, newsagents and hospitals.

Forces will also receive newly designed Distraction Burglary Victim Information leaflets containing useful contacts and crime prevention advice, to be given to all

victims of distraction burglary. The leaflet will also contain information about how to sign up to your energy supplier's Priority Service Register and Password Scheme by calling the Home Heat Helpline (0800 33 66 99). This is a free phone advice and information service run by the Energy Retail Association.

Crime prevention tips:

If you're not sure who is at your door, don't open it. Check the identity of the caller by calling the company they are purporting to be from i.e. Police, Council or Gas, Electricity, Water companies. Use the telephone numbers listed in your local directory or provided independently by your service provider. Do not use any telephone numbers provided by the caller, as they may be bogus.

Many utility service providers like gas, electricity and water, provide password schemes for customers, sign up to these. When unannounced callers claiming to be from these utility providers call at your door they should know the password if they are genuine.

'Water Boards' no longer exist, it is an obsolete phrase used only by bogus callers.

Don't keep large quantities of cash at home, put it in the bank where it is safe.

Keep doors locked and windows secure at all times.

Ensure that if you do let somebody in to your home, that you close the door behind them – distraction burglars often work in teams, where one will distract you whilst others sneak in through the insecure door.

If somebody asks for your help (ie needs to make a telephone call, lost a ball in your garden, needs a drink or pen and paper) refer them to a younger neighbour or assist them through a closed door or call a friend or neighbour to come and help.

If you suspect a bogus caller is at your door call the police immediately.