

Advice when supporting a victim of white goods protection fraud.

We all know that broken household appliances can be a pain to sort out, we might not have the cash available to replace the item so many of us pay for what is known as white goods insurance or appliance protection. This is a market sector that is increasing and there are big companies involved in this kind of cover and for many people, the small monthly payments are an affordable way of paying for peace of mind.

Unfortunately, there are rogue companies that are cashing in on this market and they can confuse people by claiming to be a genuine company, or by offering cover for appliances that are already protected by another firm. People can suffer massive amounts of financial loss, particularly when these fraudulent companies are taking multiple payments. Evidence from Which! Magazine points to these companies deliberately targeting vulnerable customers, and in some cases the regulator, the Information Commissioner's Office, found the companies did not provide the appliance protection they were charging people for.

When examining the financial records of your client, if you come across multiple direct debit payments for appliance protection, the Trading Standards team offers the following advice.

- See if there is any paperwork with the client from the company that is supposedly covering the appliance. That might help work out which company is involved. The companies will take the payment by direct debit or by a continuous payment authority, a regular transaction from the client's debit or credit card, so you should be able to see the transactions on bank or credit card statements.
- Check with the client that they still have the appliance that the cover is for. It might be the case that the appliance broke down some time ago and was taken away. Yet the client might be still paying for cover for the item and a separate policy on their new appliance too.
- Ensure that the client has contact details for the companies that they are paying. If they can't get hold of them, how will they be able to report a broken appliance. If there is no paperwork available, then consider supporting the client to make further enquiries with their bank as to who the funds are being paid to and if necessary to cancel the relevant direct debit.
- Make sure the client's landline and mobile telephone numbers are registered with the Telephone Preference Service. [Telephone Preference Service](#) While registration won't prevent rogue companies from contacting your client, it will reduce the number of sales and marketing phone calls that your client receives. Crucially the Information Commissioner's Office takes action, including fines, against companies that cold call people who are registered with the TPS. Cold calls received after registration can be reported to the ICO [Nuisance calls and messages | ICO](#)
- At the time of writing this guidance (Jan '25) the Trading Standards team has access to free call blocking units which can easily be installed in your client's home. The units will block all unwanted calls and depending on the settings, callers can either announce themselves before their call goes through, or they can hear a message asking them to redial a family member's phone for example. The units deliver complete peace of mind and can be installed very easily.

Trading Standards would be interested in any information that you are able to obtain about rogue appliance protection companies and can share the details securely with enforcement colleagues across the country. If you need further advice, please don't hesitate to contact the team.