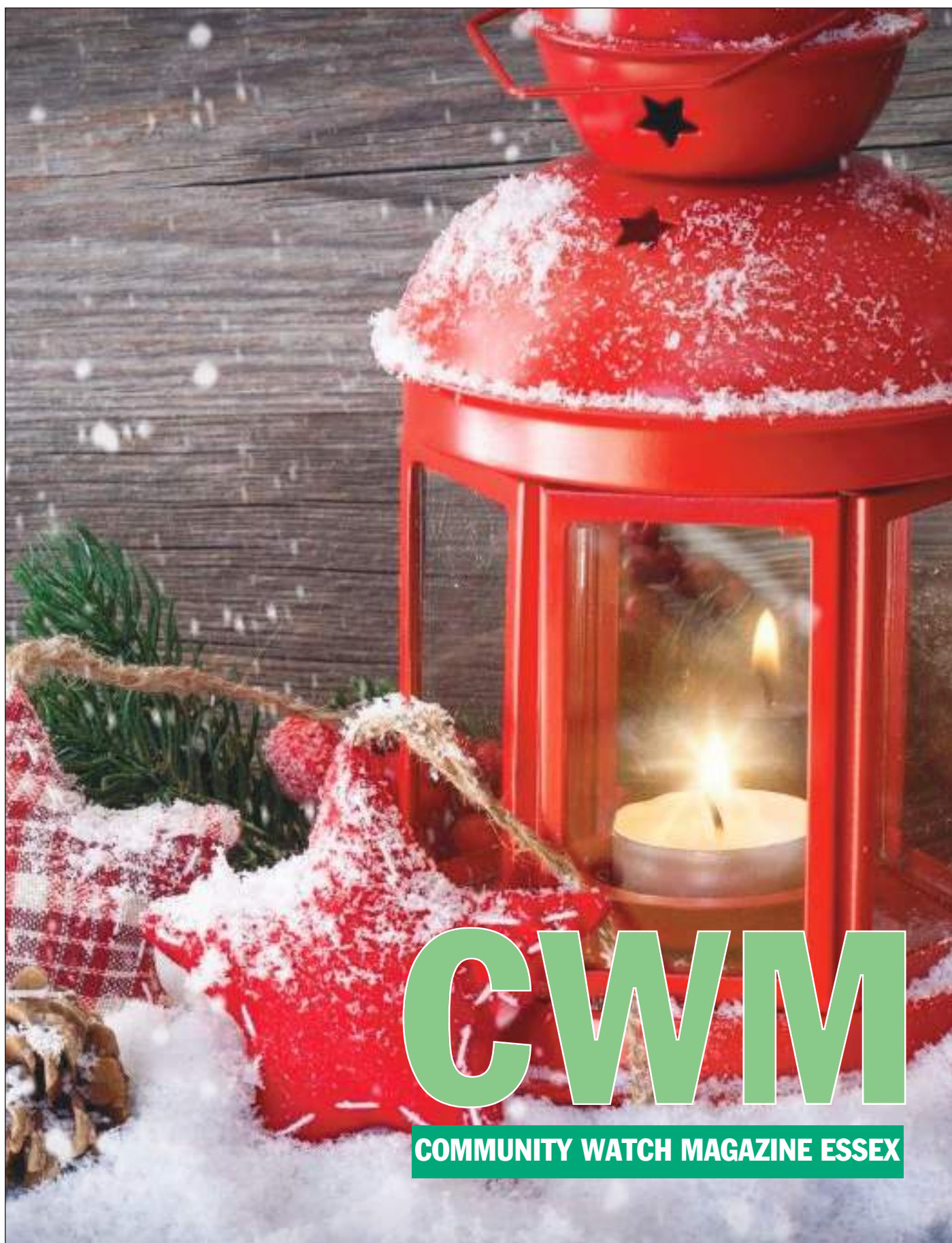




MERRY XMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR TO OUR READERS



CWM

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE: 8 PAGE CHRISTMAS SPECIAL

Illegal vape pens

A WARNING has been sent nationwide to anyone buying vape pens - they could be illegal with high amounts of nicotine.

Hundreds of illegal vape pens worth £14,000 were seized in the Midlands.

During the sting Trading Standards officers bagged up hundreds of illegal vape bars.

Some of these vapes contain five times the amount of nicotine and e-liquid that is legal - with an average vape yielding up to 1,500 puffs - the equivalent of smoking over 100 cigarettes.

Illegal vapes such as these are often fruit flavoured and brightly coloured to make them more attractive to children.

Scooter fire hazard

ELECTRIC scooters could be banned on public transport after two incidents of scooters catching fire in London.

A shocking video posted online shows an e-scooter on fire being thrown out of a District line train near Parsons Green station a month after a similar incident on the Jubilee Line.

Passengers were heard coughing and gasping for air as smoke escapes the carriages following the e-scooter catching fire on-board the train.

Unions say they have been warning about the dangers of e-scooters on trains but no action has been taken yet.

Pension safety

PENSION savers will have stronger protections against scammers trying to tempt them into transferring their life savings with bogus offers. New regulations came into force in November meaning suspect transfers can now be stopped as pension trustees and managers have new been given powers to intervene.

Have a great time, but be on your guard



DRINK spiking has become a frightening new trend in pubs, clubs, bars and private parties across the country and at a time when young women - and men - will be out celebrating Christmas and New Year police have issued a warning.

Whilst most places are safe for women to celebrate with their friends, they are being advised to take extra precautions this year.

"We are aware there are a number of reports circulating on social media about drinks being spiked and more specifically the injection of drugs," said a police spokesman.

"We would encourage anyone who believes their drink may have been spiked or they have been injected to report their concerns immediately to the management of the premises they may be in. They can then ensure its reported and appropriate support is offered to individuals.

"We know that lots of people are posting about their experiences online and we would encourage them to contact us to let us know what's happened.

"We are taking all reports seriously and would encourage anyone who believes they have been a victim of spiking in any form to contact the police immediately on 101 or report it to the club or bar owner.

"Spiking, where someone adds drugs or alcohol to another person's drink or injects them without them knowing, is illegal. Whether it's done as a prank or with the intent to steal from or assault the victim we want people to be vigilant.

"If you're drinking with strangers be aware of what's happening around you and if you have any suspicions about someone report them to staff immediately. It's always good to have a drinks buddy.

"If you're out with a friend, or friends, keep an eye out for them. If they appear to be more drunk than you'd expect, dizzy or slurring their words, take control and make sure they're okay. If you're concerned, make sure they either get medical help or get home safely."

THE Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI), the British Toy and Hobby Association (BTHA) and ROSPA are raising concerns about on-line purchases of toys this Christmas.

In what looks like a return to a lockdown-free Christmas, CTSI warns the public to be cautious when purchasing toys, particularly online, with Statista reporting that online market revenue in the UK is expected to reach almost £90bn by the end of 2021.

While, in October, BTHA raised concerns about the safety of toys purchased through third-party sellers on online marketplaces such as Amazon and eBay in its Still Toying with Children's Safety report.

The BTHA research revealed that nearly half of the toys purchased from third-party sellers via online marketplaces were unsafe for children.

Out of the 255 randomly selected toys inspected and tested, 88% were illegal to sell in the UK, and 48% were unsafe.

Head of BTHA public affairs, Kerri Atherton, said: "It is not acceptable that unsafe toys are allowed to enter the UK market, putting children at risk of serious injury.

"Following our investigation, we are calling for urgent changes to the law to prevent the sale of dangerous toys. In the lead up to Christmas, we would advise people to exercise caution when purchasing via an online marketplace by researching into the third-party seller."

Trading standards professionals working among import teams are busy inspecting products entering the country during the Christmas holiday.

This time last year, teams seized and destroyed millions of unsafe PPE items during the height of the pandemic.

This year, trading standards teams reported several instances of hazardous products entering ports in England.

A common example of this includes toys containing phthalates of a type that are banned. Phthalates are used to make plastic more durable, but their toxicity can damage the liver, kidneys,



Online toys are putting your child in danger

lungs, and reproductive system.

In October, an American study found that approximately 100,000 deaths a year in the United States can be attributed to phthalates in food packaging. In most instances, these products are destroyed at the border, and shopping platforms are ordered to take the product listings down.

Chief Executive at CTSI, John Herri-man, said: "It sickens me that unscrupulous manufacturers are using dangerous materials in products popular with children, especially phthalates which cause serious toxic effects and even death.

"Many people are especially looking forward to these Christmas holidays after the unprecedented challenges of the past 18 months that the pandemic brought. They don't want the threat of unsafe toys entering their households."

Trading standards professionals across the country focus on protecting our children from harmful toys, especially during the holiday period.

They are destroying unsafe and illegal products at the border, and trading standards are doing their utmost to get dangerous products delisted and removed from online retailers.

"The public must remain vigilant and check the safety information and origin of the products they purchase.

"Above all, they should report instances of dangerous products to the authorities as it helps paint a complete picture of the scale of this issue."

Ashley Martin, public health adviser at RoSPA, said: "As more and more of us decide to shop online, many of us may be unaware that online platforms are not always the seller of the products on their websites, but often act as an intermediary between an independent company and the buyer."

Before you buy online, ask yourself the following:

- are you buying directly from an online platform or is it a third-party seller?
- what do you know about the seller's reputation for selling safe goods?
- is the seller based in the UK?
- does the seller provide a name and address for you to contact?

For consumer advice or to report unsafe products in England and Wales, please call the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline on 0800 223 1133.

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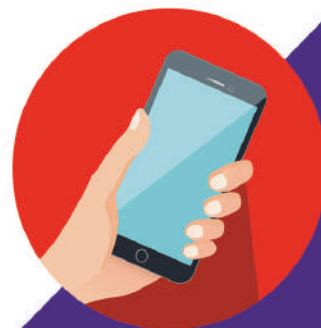
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- The call is not recorded
- The telephone line is scrambled – it is impossible to redial or track the source of your call
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In an emergency always call 999.



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Helping make roads safer over the festive season

TRADITIONALLY, Christmas and the New Year has been a time when Crimestoppers runs campaigns appealing for information on drink drivers.

However, there is a new threat: One in twenty fatalities on our roads nationally are caused by drug drivers.

Many innocent lives are being put at risk by a small number of people who choose to break the law whilst behind the wheel.

While the festive period sees office parties and get-togethers with family and friends, there comes a spike in drivers who risk losing their licence by being over the alcohol limit or under the influence of drugs.

Drug drive testing

Many people who drive after taking drugs feel that they will not get caught. They insist they are in control.

Driving under the influence of illegal drugs is increasing throughout the country, people often do not realise that drugs can remain in their system for a considerable amount of time.

Drug drivers – as much as drink drivers – put other people's lives at risk and your anonymous information to the charity Crimestoppers could help pre-

vent a potentially damaging or fatal collision from happening.

An alarming rise

Whilst drink driving is well researched and the risk of being caught by police well known, drug driving is relatively new.

Our colleagues in law enforcement are increasingly using drug wipes and saliva testing kits to catch those who are unfit to drive. This has led to an increase in convictions.

And if the North West is anything to go by, drug driving is rising at an alarming rate.

For the 12 months from April 2020 to April 2021, our charity received over 3,000 reports on drink and drug driving in this region – and yet, over the last seven months alone, that figure was already exceeded.

Communities are the key

Community intelligence given to our charity is vital in keeping roads safe and catching those who regularly drink and drug drive.

Our campaigns seek to both discourage anyone who may be thinking of getting behind the wheel and ensure they consider the implications of their actions on themselves, their families, or the families of the potential victims.

If you know who is a regular drink or drug driver, then tell our charity what you know.

Call our UK Contact Centre on freephone 0800 555 111 or complete our simple and secure anonymous online form. You'll stay 100% anonymous and will help keep our streets safe from harm.



This is often the end result of taking drugs while driving



Buying online...

THE closure of shops during the COVID pandemic has highlighted some of the benefits and advantages of shopping online. It can be more accessible, easier to shop around, and help to save time and money.

However, it's important to know what to do if something goes wrong:

If there is a problem with an item you've bought online:

- Any item you purchase should be of 'satisfactory quality'. If the item purchased is broken or damaged, doesn't match the seller's description or fit the intended purpose, you may be entitled to a refund, repair or replacement.
- If your item arrives faulty or becomes faulty soon after purchase, you have 30 days from the date of purchase to claim a refund.
- If there's a fault with your item within the first 6 months, you're normally entitled to a repair or replacement, or if this isn't possible a refund.
- After 6 months, you may be able to request a part-refund, repair or replacement, although you may need to prove that you didn't cause the fault.
- If your online purchase is fake or counterfeit, you have the legal right to a refund, and you can report the seller to Trading Standards.

These rights only apply to purchases made from a business and not from a private seller.

If your online purchase hasn't arrived:

- It's the seller's responsibility to make sure the item is delivered to you.
- If the seller used a courier, they should chase the courier to find out what's happened to your order.
- Check the delivery address you gave the seller, then contact them and ask where your order is. If the seller claims they've delivered it or doesn't know where it is, you can ask for a redelivery or potentially a refund depending on the circumstances.
- Your rights can be different if you're buying online from a private seller. Goods must be as described to you by the seller, but the seller doesn't have to disclose any faults. The seller can't misrepresent the item – for example claiming something used is brand new.



Follow us on Facebook and Twitter for useful leaflets to share with your friends and family. Don't take chances, follow our advice and stay safe.



Buy With Confidence

The only nationally available business approval scheme that's owned, controlled and operated by Trading Standards services.

Whether you need a plumber, electrician or anything else, visit BuyWithConfidence.gov.uk to find businesses that have been fully checked, vetted and continue to be monitored by Trading Standards.

BuyWithConfidence.gov.uk



...the risks and your rights



**Take care
when buying
online this
Christmas**

**Who to
contact if
something
goes wrong**

What are my rights to return items if I have changed my mind?

● You have the right to cancel your order for a full refund up to 14 days after receiving your goods. You then have a further 14 days to send the item back. However, the item must be in a 'sellable condition'.

This can vary depending on the item, for example you won't be able to return a CD or DVD if you have already removed the plastic wrapping. Check the terms and conditions to see if you need to pay postage on an unwanted order.

It is important to remember that the retailer should cover the cost of returning an item that is not of satisfactory quality, not fit for purpose or not as described.

What can I do if I have a problem?

● Contact the seller first to try to re-

solve the issue. If they have an official complaints procedure, ensure you keep a copy of anything you send to them.

If the seller is part of a trade association, they may be able to help you if you cannot solve the problem with the retailer. For purchases over £100 paid by



credit card, you can tell your credit card company that you want to make a claim under section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act.

If you paid by debit card you can contact your bank to find out if they operate a chargeback scheme.

Check if the trader belongs to an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) scheme, this may offer an alternative solution to going to court. Ultimately, you can make a 'small claim' to the court if your problem hasn't been resolved.

● If purchasing from a company that is not based in the UK, be aware that your usual consumer rights will not apply.

This is a summary of some of your key rights. For detailed information from Citizens Advice or to report a business to Trading Standards please visit www.citizensadvice.org.uk or call 0808 223 1133.

To find a reputable trader approved and vetted by Trading Standards visit **www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk**

For general help and advice or to report a problem with a trader you can telephone the Citizens Advice Consumer helpline on **0808 223 1133**





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So, whether you need a plumber, electrician, roofer or anything else, visit **BuyWithConfidence.gov.uk** to find Trading Standards Approved businesses you can trust.



CRIME AND COMMUNITY NEWS



Toys hid drug haul

CHRIS Michaelides from Chigwell (pictured above) has been jailed for 20 years after using children's toys to bring cocaine into the UK.

He was sentenced at Woolwich Crown Court last month after previously pleading guilty to several offences including conspiracy to supply a controlled drug and possession of a firearm and ammunition.

The Metropolitan Police said the 52-year-old, of Millwell Crescent, was arrested in June last year following investigations also involving the National Crime Agency and European authorities.

The investigation into Michaelides found he was using an encrypted mobile phone for his criminal communications, the force said.

Messages showed he was in contact with others based in the UK, Holland and the Czech Republic, and was involved in the importation of cocaine for about six years.

Attacked with drill

A MAN who attacked his neighbour with an electric drill in an argument over late night DIY has been jailed.

Officers were called to an address in Church End, Harlow at around 1pm on 3 August last year after reports a man had been attacked with an electric drill.

When they arrived officers found a man, 45 year-old Eddie Achunche still with the drill in his hand. The victim accused him of drilling late at night and keeping residents awake.

The victim, a man in his 30s, sustained serious injuries to his head and face, with the drill bit found to have gone 5cm into his brain. He is still suffering the after-effects today.

At Chelmsford Crown Court Achunche was found guilty of grievous bodily harm without intent and was jailed for four years and six months.

Drug gang cracked

SIX men part of a Southend drugs gang have been jailed for more than 20 years for their roles in dealing drugs across the county.

An extensive police probe, carried out by the south disruptor team in April, through a number of warrants, established the drug line was being led by Jason Balding, 40.

When his home address in Thames Close, Southend, was raided, officers seized more than 152g of cannabis and cocaine worth around £60,000 from a garage belonging to him.

Gary Salvin of Biggin Lane, Tilbury, Daniel Deadman of Sherwood Way, Southend, Tony Carter, of Albany Avenue, Westcliff, Mark Barrett, of Glenwood Avenue, Westcliff, and Joshua Leck-Bennet, of Woodfield Road, Leigh,

Sentences totalled 20 years with Balding, the head of the group, being put away for seven years.

E-scooter offences

NEW figures have revealed how many crimes involved e-scooters across Essex in the last two years.

A published freedom of information request has broken down the specific crimes per month which involved e-scooters.

In 2020, there were 100 crimes across the county which involved the electric scooters, with 41 of these recorded as thefts. A further 26 involved robberies.

There was only five crimes involving e-scooters in 2019. A whopping 994 incidents with e-scooters involved were reported last year, compared to just 59 the year before.

In December 2020, 132 incidents were reported to Essex Police.

Assault conviction

WORK by specialist detectives have led to a man who indecently assaulted a teenage girl more than 20 years ago has been convicted.

Michael McKenzie assaulted the girl between 1996 and 1998 in Southend. He was arrested after the victim reported to the police in July 2019.

The Essex Quest team carried out the investigation into the allegations and charged the 63 year-old McKenzie, of The Grove, Southend.

He denied the charges but, following a trial at Basildon Crown Court, he was found guilty of indecent assault last month. McKenzie is due to be sentenced at the same court this month.

The Quest team is a specialist unit set up in 2019 which investigates allegations of non-recent child abuse.

The remit is they investigate offences that took place more than a year ago and that the victim was under 18 at the time of the offence.

Stay out of town

ESSEX Police have made six members of the Rayleigh-based Gutless Gang the subject of injunctions banning them from associating with their own gang members and rival groups.

They are also banned from entering parts of Leigh, Southend and Rayleigh in an attempt to curb drug dealing, violence and anti-social behaviour.

The six men have been named as Levi Bellfield, 20, of no fixed address, Harvie Butt, 19, of Down Hall Road, Rayleigh, Luke Collins-Walker, 24, of no fixed address, Louis Dawkins, 20, of Lodge Close, Rayleigh, Harry Sampson, 19, of Highfield Gardens, Westcliff, and Flynn Symonds, 32, of no fixed address.

They are banned from entering eight areas of Southend. This takes Essex Police's total injunction count to 20 after similar court orders were made against five boys from the 'Leigh Lot' and ten boys from 'O Block' this year.



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Don't forget to insure Christmas

IRONICALLY, the pandemic offered some cheer last Christmas because, as most people were confined to their homes, so too were the criminals.

But generally Christmas and New Year offer rich pickings for thieves because they know many home owners are likely to be away visiting or out shopping enjoying the sales season.

Between September last year and August this year there were almost 232,000 burglaries and many of these would have taken place during the festive season when most households are opening new electrical goods, video games, mobile phones, and jewellery gifts.

Criminal activity tends to peak more during the holiday season due to several factors.

Criminals know that people will be out shopping or traveling meaning that there are lots of valuables in cars and homes that may be unprotected. - more victims with more things to steal.

It is nearly impossible to make yourself completely invulnerable to crime, but you can lower your risk.

This means spending more time checking your online habits, becoming situationally aware and keeping things from plain sight in both your car and home.

Lock your doors, turn on your lights, and keep your eyes open. Christmas is a time for giving and receiving, and certainly not for losing.

But another important thing to check



is whether you have enough insurance cover. Remember that new iPhone could cost well over £1,000. Is your insurance policy adequate?

That £3,000 diamond ring could also lose its glitter if you are not properly insured. And if little Harry's new Xbox gets stolen you will have one unhappy boy over Christmas.

People need to remain vigilant of any suspicious activity and try to keep any gifts out of view from windows to avoid advertising to opportunist burglars.

A police spokesman said there was an increase in burglaries in 2019 as criminals made off with easily available pickings under Christmas trees.

It is also sensible to conceal those

 **Follow us on Facebook and Twitter for useful advice to share with your friends and family. Don't take chances, follow our advice and stay safe.**



XBox and iPhone boxes inside your home and turn inside out for recycling.

Christmas is still a peak time for burglaries and home security should remain a priority. Have a rethink about where to hide presents so you don't have to get on the phone to your insurer with a heartbreak story.

Top places for hiding your presents:

1. The loft or basement
2. Under the bed
3. In or on top of wardrobes
4. Hide them in suitcases
5. In the car boot or garage
6. In laundry baskets

As long as it is not on full view from your lounge or kitchen window then any potential burglar is more likely to give your home a miss.

Statistics show there is a burglary every 106 seconds with insurance providers paying out a staggering average of £3,030 per household.

Annual burglary costs per area:
London £181m; Greater Manchester £65.98m; Lancashire £28.11m; Kent £26.19m; Essex £26.15m; Thames Valley £24.51m; Norfolk £6.81m.

So if you have bought an item of significant value, such as a piece of jewellery, a games console or work of art, get it checked with **A-Plan**, in case there's a policy limit for a single item.

Make sure you are adequately insured this Christmas, simply call our friendly branch on 01772 230 470.



European manhunt

A EUROPEAN manhunt is under way for a man accused of one of the biggest burglaries in English legal history, a BBC investigation has found.

Alfredo Lindley is said to have led a series of burglaries on the luxury homes of three celebrities in December 2019 - including a £25m raid on the home of FI heiress Tamara Ecclestone.

Italian authorities also accuse Lindley of raiding the home of Patrick Vieira, now Crystal Palace manager, in 2009. Lindley is believed to be in Belgrade.

Furlough fraud

MORE than £5.5bn of taxpayer money from the government's coronavirus assistance schemes including furlough, self-employed support and "eat out to help out" was paid out to fraudsters or given out incorrectly.

It has emerged that £5.5bn paid out by the government under the coronavirus job retention scheme, widely known as furlough, ended up in the hands of fraudsters or was paid in error.

HM Revenue and Customs acknowledged in its annual report that about 8.7% of the £60bn it paid out under the furlough scheme in the 2020-21 tax year ended up in the hands of organised crime gangs, fraudsters or was awarded erroneously.

The furlough scheme paid 80% of the wages of up to 11.5 million workers up to a maximum of £2,500 a month.

It's a carve-up

A WARNING has been issued over a scam circulating on social media pretending to be from pub restaurant chain Toby Carvery.

It involves a fake brand offering free items, vouchers or food as a 'gesture of goodwill' in the run up to Christmas. It's a scam. Similar scams have been reported involving Wagamama and Primark.



Royal Mail warning

ROYAL Mail has issued a warning to every household in the UK after two new scams attempting to steal personal information and cash have emerged.

Scams come in all forms, but the latest ones to be aware of have been reported to come in the form of an email or text message and there are key things you can keep an eye out for when trying to spot them.

Royal Mail sent out a warning after ActionFraud deemed the email "malicious".

Millions of homes around the UK have been contacted to be made aware of the phishing emails and texts.

Back in late 2020, there was a similar scam doing the rounds, which cleverly targeted Christmas shoppers avidly awaiting their parcels in the post.

The scam predominantly targeted DPD customers, asking them to pay a fee in order to receive their latest order.

How you will know it's not Royal Mail

With regards to the latest set of scams doing the rounds, Royal Mail said:

- Royal Mail will never send an email asking for credit card numbers or personal or confidential information.
- Royal Mail will never ask customers to enter information on a page that isn't part of the Royal Mail website.
- Royal Mail will never include attachments unless the email was solicited by customer e.g. customer has contacted Royal Mail with an enquiry or has signed up for updates from Royal Mail.
- Royal Mail have also stressed that they do not receive a person's email address as part of any home shopping experience.

Royal Mail scam one

Scams are circulating by text and email and tells recipients to make payments so they ensure their packages can get delivered. The text states: "Royal Mail: your package has a £2.99 shipping fee. Action will be taken if you fail to pay. It also includes a seemingly legitimate Royal Mail website, but it is all bogus.

Royal Mail scam two

ActionFraud has received 1,700 reports about scam emails claiming a parcel had not been delivered. The message, which appears at first glance almost genuine, warns homeowners if they don't opt for delivery, they will return the package to the sender. It then directs the customer to a link, asking them to fill out an information form. The form then asks users for their card number, security code, sort code, account number and mother's maiden name.

MERRY XMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR TO OUR READERS



Test your brains in
our Xmas quiz - P14



How Coca Cola took
over Xmas- P14-16



Customs from around
the world - P18-19



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INSIDE: XMAS QUIZ, XMAS CUSTOMS AND FUN FACTS



DID YOU KNOW...1



1. Christmas wasn't always December 25

While Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ, the actual date is lost to history. There's no mention of December 25 in the Bible and many historians say Jesus was really born in the spring. Some historians claim the date was originally chosen because it coincided with the pagan festival of Saturnalia, which honored the agricultural god Saturn with celebrating and gift-giving.

2. Gifts have both Christian and Pagan origins

Christians may have grown up learning that we give gifts at Christmas to mimic the presents the Three Wise Men brought the baby Jesus. But like so many other traditions, that also has its roots in Saturnalia. The pagans originally gave offerings to the gods, too.

3. Evergreens are an ancient tradition

The tradition of Christmas trees goes all the way back to ancient Egyptians and Romans, who decorated with evergreens during the winter solstice to signify that spring would return. So if you deck your halls with a green tree, wreaths or evergreen garland, you're honoring history.

4. You can thank Prince Albert for your Christmas tree

When Prince Albert of Germany got a tree for his new wife, Queen Victoria of England, it really took off across the pond. A drawing of the couple in front of a Christmas first tree appeared in Illustrated London News in 1848. To use modern parlance, the idea went viral.



5. St. Nick was more generous than jolly

You probably already knew that the idea of Santa Claus came from St. Nicholas. The saint wasn't a bearded man who wore a red suit; that tradition came much later. In the fourth century, the Christian bishop gave away his large inheritance to the poor and rescued women from servitude. In Dutch, his name is Sinter Klaas, which later morphed into Santa Claus in English.

6. The Dutch gave us the idea to leave cookies and milk

If your kids leave Santa a little snack to keep him sated on your journey, thank the Dutch. On St. Nicholas' feast day on Dec. 6, Dutch children leave him food and drink to be exchanged for gifts overnight.

7. Coca-Cola played a key part in Santa's image

Before Coca-Cola decided to use his image for advertising, Santa's looks tended more spooky than jolly. Then, in 1931, the beverage company hired an illustrator named Haddon Sundblom to depict the jolly old elf for magazine ads. Now, kids see visions of sug-arplums instead of having Santa nightmares.

8. Hanging stockings started by accident

Legend has it, we hang stockings by the chimney with care thanks to a poor man who didn't have enough money for his three daughters' dowries. Generous old St. Nick dropped a bag of gold down their chimney one night after the girls had hung their freshly-washed stockings there to dry. That's where the gold ended up, and the tradition stuck.



DID YOU KNOW...2



9. Rudolph was a marketing ploy

Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer first appeared in 1939 when the Montgomery Ward department store asked one of its copywriters to create a Christmas story for kids that the store could distribute as a promotion. The adorable movie featuring the island of misfit toys and Herbie the elf was born in 1964.



10. Black Friday isn't the busiest shopping day

Black Friday, or the day after Thanksgiving, certainly sees lots of shoppers heading to the mall. But we must be a nation of procrastinators, because the most hectic days of the year are actually the Friday and Saturday before Christmas.

11. The eight reindeer have had lots of names

Rudolph was almost named Rollo or Reginald, which doesn't quite have the same ring to it. But his crew also had lots of other names. They've also been called Flossie, Glossie, Racer, Pacer, Scratcher, Feckless, Ready, Steady and Fireball.

12. Christmas wreaths are religious symbols

The Christmas wreath first originated as a symbol of Christ. The holly represents the crown of thorns Jesus wore at his crucifixion and the red berries stand for the blood he shed. So when you see a wreath this holiday, you'll remember the reason for the season.



13. "Jingle Bells" was originally a Thanksgiving song

Turns out, we first started dashing through the snow for an entirely different holiday. James Lord Pierpont wrote the song called "One Horse Open Sleigh" for his church's Thanksgiving concert in the mid-19th Century. Then in 1857, it was re-released under the title we all know and love. Today, it's still among the most popular Christmas songs.

14. Astronauts broadcast "Jingle Bells" from space

Nine days before Christmas in 1965, two astronauts aboard the Gemini 6 told Mission Control that they saw an "unidentified flying object" about to enter Earth's atmosphere, traveling in the polar orbit from north to south. Just as things got tense, they interrupted the broadcast with "Jingle Bells," as Wally Schirra played a small harmonica accompanied by Tom Stafford shaking a handful of small sleigh bells.



15. Silent Night is the most recorded song

We all know the same few handfuls of Christmas songs play at stores and on the radio in a loop all season long. But one of them has been adapted more than others. Silent Night ears that title, as the most-recorded Christmas song in history. It's had more than 733 different versions copyrighted since 1978.

17. Settlers created the first American eggnog

The Jamestown settlers created the first American batch of eggnog, although it likely bore little resemblance to today's comforting tippie. The word nog comes from the word grog; or any drink made with rum. An early nog didn't have the rich, milky base we now ladle out of grandma's cut-crystal punch bowl.





DID YOU KNOW...3



18. Santa has his own Canadian postal code

Every year, letters to Santa Claus flood post offices across the world, putting parents in a tough spot as they figure out how to answer them or explain why their kids' letters got lost in the mail. Cementing their reputation as some of the nicest people ever, some big-hearted Canadian Post Office workers started writing back. As the program took off, they set up a special postal code for Santa as part of a Santa Letter-Writing Program initiative: HOH OHO.

20. Dry Christmas trees spark more than joy

Neglected, dried-out Christmas trees spark about a hundred fires in the United States each year, cause an average of 10 deaths, and result in \$15.7 million in property damage, the Consumer Product Safety Commission reports. Not only will an errant spark ruin your holiday, it can put both residents and responding firefighters in danger.

21. The term "Xmas" dates back to the 1500s

Contrary to popular believe, "Xmas" is not a trendy attempt to take Christ out of Christmas. According to From Adam's Apple to Xmas: An Essential Vocabulary Guide for the Politically Correct, "Christianity" was spelled "Xianity" as far back as 1100. X, or Chi, is the Greek first letter of "Christ" and served as a symbolic stand-in at the time. In 1551, the holiday was commonly called "



22. Mistletoe is an aphrodisiac

The holiday decoration isn't just pretty. It's also an ancient symbol of fertility and virility — and the Druids considered it an aphrodisiac. So the next time someone cracks a joke about meeting you under the mistletoe, consider yourself warned.

23. Ham ranks as the festive favorite

One of the showstoppers of Christmas dinner is carving the roast beast, whatever species it comes from. Google searches for "ham" and "turkey" both spike during the month of December, according to Google Trends data. Spiral-cut ham edges out the bird as the most popular choice for a Christmas table.

24. Candy canes originated in Germany

The National Confectioners Association says a choirmaster originally gave the red-and-white-striped candies to young children to keep them quiet during marathon church services. Grandmas who still sneak the kids sweets during droning sermons, history is on your side. It wasn't until a German-Swedish immigrant decorated his tree with candy canes in 1847 that they became popular as a Christmas candy.



25. This Christmas gift held a lifesaving secret

During World War II, The United States Playing Card Company joined forces with American and British intelligence agencies to create a very special deck of cards. They distributed them as Christmas gifts, but they also helped allied prisoners of war escape from German POW camps. When wet, individual cards peeled apart to reveal maps of escape routes. Sometimes truth really is stranger than fiction.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE



Question 1: Which popular Christmas beverage is also called "milk punch?"

Question 2: What did the other reindeer not let Rudolph do because of his shiny red nose?

Question 3: How many ghosts show up in A Christmas Carol?

Question 4: Where was baby Jesus born?

Question 5: What real life store is Miracle on 34th Street based on?

Question 6: What are the two other most popular names for Santa Claus?

Question 7: Elvis isn't going to have a white Christmas he's going to have a....

Question 8: What do people traditionally put on top of a Christmas tree?

Question 9: In Home Alone, where are the McCallisters going on vacation when they leave Kevin behind?

Question 10: In How The Grinch Stole Christmas, the Grinch was described with three words. What are they?

Question 11: In which modern-day country was St. Nicholas born in?

Question 12: In It's A Wonderful Life, what happened every time a bell rang?

Question 13: What words follow "Silent Night" in the song?



Question 14: Which Hollywood actor played six different roles in The Polar Express?

Question 15: In A Christmas Carol, what was the first name of Scrooge?

Question 16: Which country did eggnog come from?

Question 17: Which real-life person is Santa Claus based on?

Question 18: What did Frosty The Snowman do when a magic hat was placed on his head?

Question 19: What is Ralphie's little brother's name in A Christmas Story?

Question 20: Which Christmas song contains the lyric "Everyone dancing merrily in the new old-fashioned way?"

Question 21: What are you supposed to do when you find yourself under the mistletoe?

Question 22: Which one of Santa's reindeer has the same name as another holiday mascot?

Question 23: Which country started the tradition of putting up a Christmas tree?

Question 24: In "Winter Wonderland," what do we call the snowman?

Question 25: In the movie Elf, what was the first rule of The Code of Elves?



Question 26: What's the name of the main villain in The Nightmare Before Christmas?

Question 27: According to the song, what did my true love give to me on the eighth day of Christmas?

Question 28: What was the highest-grossing Christmas movie of all time?

Question 29: Whose eyes are all aglow in "The Christmas Song?"

Question 30: What was the real name of the character Tim Allen in The Santa Clause?

Question 31: How many gifts in total were given in "The Twelve Days of Christmas" song?

Question 32: Which fairy tale was the first gingerbread houses inspired by?

Question 33: In A Christmas Story, what was the name of the neighbours whose dog ate the Christmas turkey?

Question 34: Say "Merry Christmas" in Spanish?

Question 35: What is the name of the last ghost that visits Scrooge in A Christmas Carol?

Question 36: What is the best-selling Christmas song ever?



Xmas quiz answers can be found on page 20



XMAS CUSTOMS...1



Austria

BRITISH kids are lucky they don't live in Austria, where a ghoulish creature called 'Krampus', the evil accomplice of St Nicholas, is said to wander the streets in search of badly-behaved children. During the month of December you can expect to see terrifying masked figures out and about scaring kids and adults alike with ghastly pranks.

Caracas

IN the Venezuelan capital of Caracas, city-dwellers make their way to mass on roller skates every Christmas morning. The tradition is so well-established that many of the city's streets are closed to traffic from 8am on the day. It's even said that children will sleep with one lace from their skates tied around their toe, the other skate dangling from the window so that their friends can wake them up with a friendly tug on the lace.

Iceland

ONE of the weirdest festive traditions comes from Iceland, where a giant cat is said to roam the snowy countryside at Christmas time. Traditionally farmers would use the Yule Cat as an incentive for their workers - those who worked hard would receive a new set of clothes, but those who didn't would be devoured by the gigantic cat-like beast.



Ukraine

UKRAINE'S strangest festive tradition is not one for arachnophobes! Ukrainians use decorations that mimic the natural formation of spiders' webs shimmering with dew. The tradition goes back to a folktale about a poor widow who could not afford to decorate a tree for her children. Legend has it that spiders in the house took pity on the family's plight, and spun beautiful webs all over the tree.

Japan

BACK in 1974, the American fast-food restaurant KFC released a festive marketing campaign in Japan. The seemingly simple slogan "Kurisumasu ni wa kentakkii!" (Kentucky for Christmas!) spawned a national tradition that still thrives to this day. Although Christmas is not even a national holiday in Japan, families from all over the country head to their local KFC for a special Christmas Eve meal.

Germany

THE Christmas tree tradition embraced around the world today is believed to have started in Germany in the 16th Century, so it comes as no surprise that our Teutonic cousins still have some funny customs relating to the festive trees. One of these is to hide a pickle somewhere within the branches of the tree, and give a gift to whichever child in the household finds it.



Denmark

BEFORE Christianity came to the Danes, Christmas Day was a celebration of brighter days, jól, as it occurred just before winter solstice. Today, homes are decorated with superstitious characters called nisser who are believed to provide protection. On the evening of December 24, Danish families place their Christmas tree in the middle of the room and dance around it while singing carols.

XMAS CUSTOMS...2



Finland

MANY homes in Finland come equipped with their own sauna and on Christmas Eve, it's customary to strip naked and take a long and respectful stint in the sauna, which is also believed to be home to the legendary sauna 'elf'. After the sauna session, Finns head out to the evening celebrations - while spirits of those ancestors take their place.

The Netherlands

EVERY year in the days leading up to December 5th, Dutch children eagerly place their shoes by the fire in hopes that Sinterklaas will fill them with small gifts and treats in the night. Traditionally, carrots are left in the shoes for the companion of Sinterklaas, a white horse named Amerigo.



Italy

FORGET Santa and December 25th in Italy, as all the action takes place on the eve of January 5th. According to folklore, an old woman named Belfana visits all the children of Italy to fill their stockings with candy and leave them presents if they've been good. Just like Father Christmas, Belfana enters through the chimney.



Norway

ACCORDING to Norwegian folklore, Christmas Eve is the day when mischievous spirits and witches take to the skies for mischief and general tomfoolery. As witches often use brooms as their preferred mode of transportation, it is tradition for Norwegian families to hide any cleaning supplies attached to sticks.

Sweden

EVERY Christmas, families around Sweden gather around the television at 3pm sharp, to watch Donald Duck. Everything on Christmas is planned around the television special. The tradition dates back to the 1960's when televisions were a new commodity in Sweden and only two channels aired - one of which played Disney cartoons at Christmas.

South Africa

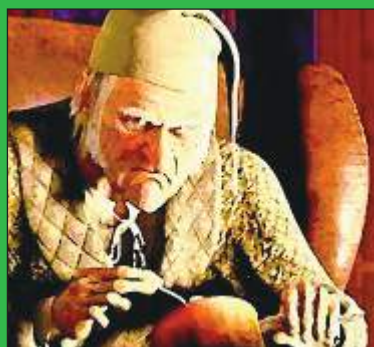
IN South Africa, it's the creepy crawlies that local children look forward to. Fried caterpillars on Christmas may seem like one of the weirdest Christmas traditions around the world, but these caterpillars aren't just the run-of-the-mill variety you find in the garden. The Pine Tree Emperor Moth, or Christmas caterpillar, is covered in very festive hues - giving all who swallow a little extra luck in the coming year.



Spain

EASILY the most outlandish Christmas tradition on this list, meet Tió de Nadal, the Christmas log. Tió de Nadal is made from a hollow log, with stick legs, a smile, and a red hat. Every evening between December 8th and Christmas Eve, the children feed the log small treats with water, and leave him under a blanket to keep him warm.

Answers from P17



- Answer 1: Eggnog
- Answer 2: Join in any reindeer games
- Answer 3: Four
- Answer 4: In Bethlehem
- Answer 5: Macey's
- Answer 6: Kris Kringle and Saint Nick
- Answer 7: Blue Christmas
- Answer 8: An angel
- Answer 9: Paris
- Answer 10: Stink, Stank, Stunk
- Answer 11: Turkey (Patara)
- Answer 12: An angel got his wings
- Answer 13: Holy Night
- Answer 14: Tom Hanks
- Answer 15: Ebenezer
- Answer 16: England
- Answer 17: The Christian bishop St. Nicholas
- Answer 18: He began to dance around
- Answer 19: Randy
- Answer 20: Rocking Around the Christmas Tree
- Answer 21: Kiss
- Answer 22: Cupid
- Answer 23: Germany
- Answer 24: Parson Brown
- Answer 25: Treat every day like Christmas
- Answer 26: Oogie Boogie
- Answer 27: Eight maids a milking
- Answer 28: Home Alone
- Answer 29: Tiny tots
- Answer 30: Scott Calvin
- Answer 31: 364
- Answer 32: Hensel and Gretel
- Answer 33: The Bumpuses
- Answer 34: Feliz Navidad
- Answer 35: The Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come
- Answer 36: 'White Christmas' by Bing Crosby

DON'T BE FOOLED BY BLACK FRIDAY



Dual range cooker



Zanussi washing machine

NINE in 10 (92%) Black Friday 'deals' are the same price or cheaper in the six months ahead of the big event, a Which? investigation has found.

The consumer champion analysed 201 of last year's Black Friday deals at six major retailers – Amazon, AO, Argos, Currys, John Lewis and Richer Sounds – looking at their prices every day during the six months before and after Black Friday as well as on the day itself.

A huge 184 of the products, which included popular items such as washing machines, soundbars and TVs, were the same price or cheaper in the six months prior to Black Friday. Only 17 of the deals did not fall into this category.

Black Friday 2021 has come and gone, but Which? is advising shoppers to do some research next year to help them hunt down the minority of deals that really are a bargain.

Consumers could have had a challenge finding a decent deal at Currys last year, given every one of the 32 products Which?'s experts looked at from the retailer's Black Friday sales had been an equal price or cheaper in the previous six months.

One of the worst individual deals was a Zanussi ZWF81441W washing machine at John Lewis that was cheaper than its Black Friday price on 88 different days before the day itself. 'Discounted' to £309 on Black Friday, customers could have bought it £60 cheaper at £249 five months before and for £289 within just a month after.

Another dubious 'deal' was a Bush BRC100DHEB 100cm Dual Fuel Range Cooker sold at Argos for £449.99 (was £499.99) but it was actually the same price 66 times before and 19 times after Black Friday.

Out of the retailers analysed, Richer Sounds had the highest proportion of deals, four out of 14, that were not cheaper or the same price before Black Friday.

When looking at prices six months before and after Black Friday 2020, just one of the 201 products was at its cheapest price on Black Friday alone.

Many shoppers do not do any research before they splash their cash on Black Friday, which leaves them at greater risk of falling for dud deals. three in 10 (28%) and for tech products it was one in five (18%).

Which? believes retailers should always make sure the discounts they quote are truly genuine. Consumers are advised not to feel pressured to rush into making a purchase. They should look to get Black Friday bargains that are the real deal this winter and choose products that are high-quality and built to last.