

15,000 people fight back against fraudsters

The UK's national fraud reporting centre, Action Fraud, has reached a milestone with 15,000 reports and calls from members of the public since it was set up six months ago.

Action Fraud is a single point of contact where fraud victims can both report fraud and seek advice.

Many frauds are plausible and complex, but people feel embarrassed at being taken in and are reluctant to speak up. The message from Action Fraud is that the more people come forward, the harder it will be for criminals to succeed.

Brenda Parke lost £60,000 to a fraudster. She said:

With great hindsight I can see how I became a victim. My embarrassment is overwhelming but I know it's important to take this step in reporting my experience to help other people avoid such devastating situations. The perpetrators manipulate you to pay a huge price financially and emotionally.+

SOCA works overseas to close down the routes fraudsters use to target the UK, but there is also a lot that individuals can do to avoid becoming victims.

The golden rules are:

- If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is
- If you didn't enter a lottery, you haven't won it
- Ask questions. If someone is legitimate they won't pressurise you or be elusive
- Be very wary about giving your personal information to strangers or providing money up front
- Always check the real company's details against the ones you have been given. Ring them direct if you are in doubt
- Above all, DON'T STAY SILENT. If you have been targeted by a fraudster and lost money, contact Action Fraud at www.actionfraud.org.uk or call 0300 123 2040.

SOCA's Colin Woodcock, speaking on the BBC's Woman's Hour, said:

Smooth operating is the hallmark of these people. They are very good at what we call social network analysis. They manage to do it without meeting people face to face.

I describe this crime as being franchised . they learn from each other and ask other people for help. All they need is an internet café, access to a computer, and email to target people. The more we delve into this, or follow the money, we find more victims.+

ENDS