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## Trading Standards- Recognising Rogue Traders

We all like to think we are on the ball and able to spot a scam or rogue trader in an instant, but today's rogue traders are very clever. Whilst their targets could be older and vulnerable people they can just as easily be young professionals responding to social media advertising. They come across as personable and plausible and draw their victims in, causing untold financial and emotional damage.

An Essex builder who fraudulently promised to deliver luxury garden rooms has been sentenced to three years imprisonment. Christopher Escrader, 35, of Little Melton, Norwich, was sentenced at Chelmsford Crown Court on 13 September 2023, after pleading guilty to four offences of Fraudulent Trading, he was also disqualified from being a company director for seven years.

Essex Trading Standards launched an investigation in September 2019 after receiving numerous complaints from victims in Essex and surrounding areas. The companies involved were Hudson Garden Rooms Limited, Hudson Bespoke Builders Limited, Hudson (Essex) Limited and Hudson Living Limited. Despite Hudson Garden Rooms Limited going into liquidation. Escrader continued to trade and receive money without notifying customers which company they were contracting with. Escrader would visit individuals and create 3D drawings of the dream builds, ranging in price from £20,000 to £108,000. He would then collect 90% of the payment before any work even started on site.

Start dates were delayed, and construction would slow or cease after a period. Victims were left with half-finished shells, non-ordered products before later finding that incorrect materials had been used.

Payments of up to £7,500 for planning permission and building control approval, were taken despite no applications being made. Six victims paid over £278,000 to Escrader for shells, incomplete builds, or no work at all. Consumers lost all money paid and collectively, the six victims had to pay approximately £150,000 to rectify the work to a finished state.

Essex trading standards urges everyone thinking of having building work done to:

1. **Do your research into any company or individual you are considering using.**
2. **Preferably go on recommendation from family or friends.**
3. **Always obtain at least three quotes.**
4. **Always enter a written contract.**
5. **Check if stage payments are to be included in the contract and payment terms.**
6. **Never make hefty upfront payments, a 10% deposit is reasonable, but no more than 25%.**
7. **Never entertain cold callers**

Remember rogue traders operate in all sectors, so please be beware of cold callers even when the caller seems to know your name and details.

**Do not be pressurised, ring Trading Standards via the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline on 0808 223 1133 who can advise on whether you are being scammed.**