

'They didn't just
steal my money...'

Tackling Distraction Burglary

A National
Distraction Burglary
Taskforce Report

Distraction Burglary Taskforce



STOP

**Are you expecting anybody?
Do they have an appointment?**



CHAIN

**Secure the door bar or chain
before opening the door**



CHECK

**Ask for & double-check the
caller's I.D.**

BOGUS CALLERS



Foreword by the Rt Hon John Denham MP, Minister of State for crime reduction, policing and community safety

In commending this report of the series of seminars on distraction burglary held in 2001/2, I would like to thank the members of the Distraction Burglary Task Force, the speakers, those that attended and everyone else who helped to make the regional conferences such a success.

Distraction burglary is a thoroughly cynical and despicable type of crime. It often involves highly practised criminals abusing the trust of victims, usually older people, on whom the effect can be considerable, in terms not just of the financial loss but also the immediate emotional harm and subsequent loss of quality of life. It is important therefore that everyone who has regular contact with potential victims and victim groups treats the threat of distraction burglary seriously.

We should bear in mind, however, that distraction burglary makes up only a small proportion of domestic burglary. It is important that we strive, therefore, to raise awareness of distraction burglary and how to prevent it with older adults without raising fear – increasing people's fear of crime, particularly older people's, can reduce their quality of life.

If we are to tackle this crime effectively, then it is crucial that all concerned work together – many other organisations, not just the police, can make a valuable contribution and I believe that with a commitment to long-term co-operation, and sharing ideas and resources, there is a real prospect of addressing this type of crime.

This report reinforces the message of the importance of partnership working as well as encouraging innovative thinking about what else can be done to tackle this repellent criminal activity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Denham' in a cursive, stylized script.

John Denham

Introduction by the National Distraction Burglary Task Force

As members of the National Distraction Burglary Taskforce, which was formed by the Home Office in April 2000 and is overseen by Home Office Minister John Denham, we have the following aim:

'To tackle distraction burglary and thereby improve the quality of life of vulnerable communities through a co-ordinated national partnership initiative within England and Wales.'

To ensure that our work to tackle this crime is both national and comprehensive, the Taskforce brings together a wide range of partners. Utility companies such as British Gas, WaterUK and the Electricity Association have worked alongside representatives from statutory agencies such as the police, local government and central government agencies – including members such as the Trading Standards Institute and the Chartered Institute of Housing. A further vital element of the Taskforce is the voluntary and community sector. Partners such as the National Neighbourhood Watch Association, Crime Concern, Crimestoppers, Age Concern and Help the Aged have all brought valuable expertise. A list of Taskforce members at the time of the seminars is provided in the first section.

Between April 2000 and April 2002, the Taskforce worked on an initial action plan guided by 6 key objectives. Much of that has been achieved – the challenge now is to sustain the messages by integrating the principles within the day-to-day practices of everyone working with, or responsible for, older people, and particularly those vulnerable to this crime.

As one element of this work, we ran a series of eleven regional seminars between November 2001 and March 2002. The main aims of the seminars were:

- to launch a good practice guide toolkit – a key element of the Taskforce's action plan;
- to help in establishing regional and sub-regional partnerships of practitioners committed to tackling the crime by bringing together delegates from a wide range of disciplines – private, statutory and voluntary; and
- to raise awareness at a more local level by working with the regional media to promote the right doorstep etiquette and the "Stop, Chain, Check" message.

Each conference covered a wide range of issues, from how the crime is committed and its effects, to the work of the Taskforce and examples of initiatives already under way within each region.

Delegates, who could be potential partners in a drive against distraction burglary, came from police forces; local authorities including social services and trading standards; health authorities; health trusts; banks and building societies; utility companies (including water, gas, electricity and telecommunications); housing associations; the housing industry; voluntary organisations involved in crime prevention and working with the elderly; and the security industry.

Presenters included the Crime Reduction Directors and their staff; water and other utility company representatives; Taskforce staff and members; colleagues working in health; and those involved in local projects. There were a number of question and answer sessions during the day, and an opportunity for those involved in local projects to share their ideas and experiences with the other attendees. We thank all those who contributed their time and efforts.

This report provides a synopsis of the talks and the contributions from delegates. We trust that you find it useful in taking forward your own partnerships to tackle this crime, and as a training resource.

Home Office Distraction Burglary Taskforce

December 2002

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Section 1

The National Distraction Burglary Taskforce

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Steve Hodgson
Marketing Manager – External Communications
Severn Trent Water
Water UK

The Water industry fully supports the Taskforce as it is often our reputation that is being tarnished by these offenders.



John Longley
Group Administration Manager
Electricity Association

I think it is important that the work being undertaken within the major electricity companies is more widely known.



Simon Henderson
Community Affairs Manager
British Gas (Centrica)

Being part of the Distraction Burglary Taskforce provides an opportunity to work with other organisations and to combine a wide level of experience and expertise to make older people aware of the dangers posed by bogus callers.



Mike Patching
Investigation Manager
British Telecom

I think it is important to identify and develop the best process to assist vulnerable members of communities and to protect customers from being exploited.



Brian Capon
Head of Media Relations
British Bankers' Association

As a member of the Taskforce I am identifying the issues affecting vulnerable people and using the British Bankers' Association to raise awareness within the community.



DAC Tim Godwin
Territorial Policing
Metropolitan Police

The Taskforce enables us to gather best practice, to integrate that into our corporate strategic and tactical thinking to protect vulnerable victims.



David Simmons
Community Safety Co-ordinator
Sussex Police Authority
National Community Safety Network (NCSN)

On behalf of the NCSN we welcome the opportunity to participate in the development of this guide, tackling one of the more insidious crimes that affect the most vulnerable.



David Fotheringham
Head of Policy
Chartered Institute of Housing

I will be looking at integrating distraction burglary issues within training programmes for housing and social care staff.



Jeremy Porteus
Anchor Housing Association

I joined the Taskforce to share its work amongst social housing care professionals and I will put partners in touch with other organisations also concerned with this crime.



Margaret Wall
Project Manager
Age Concern

As a result of its work with the Taskforce, Age Concern will continue to develop a comprehensive package of home support services for older people including advice on traders.



Roger Cohen
Principle Trading Standards Officer
Trading Standards Institute

My role with the Taskforce is to make the Trading Standards Service more aware of projects looking at protecting vulnerable people from dishonest traders and to make the service more aware of this crime.



Brian Wareham
Director of Operations
Crimestoppers Trust

Through my input in the Taskforce, I am offering the availability of Crimestoppers to all partners involved in order to raise awareness of distraction burglary throughout communities.



Martin Burke
Head of Innovation and Development,
Community Services
Help the Aged

The Taskforce is an excellent vehicle for multi-agency working. Help the Aged now has a comprehensive package of measures.



Jan King
Director of Community Service
Womens Royal Volunteer Service

As a result of my involvement within the Taskforce, I will continue building partnerships between the WRVS, public and private sector businesses in tackling distraction burglary.



Mark Brangwyn
Senior Policy Manager
Association of London Government

Two staff working full time supported the Taskforce:

Usha Choli
Community Safety Manager
Seconded from Ealing Council between
Feb 2000–April 2002

I have led in supporting the Taskforce, partnership, development research, resource generation, communication and the Good Practice guide toolkit.



Kelvyn Ashby
Superintendent
Seconded from Derbyshire Police, between
Jan 2000–March 2002;
founder of Operation Liberal

I have led on police aspects such as establishing regional intelligence sharing processes, building an offender database, supporting regional police initiatives and communication matters.



Section 2

Speakers' Contributions

Each of the conferences explored a wide range of issues relating to distraction burglary, including:

- The nature of distraction burglary.
- The work of the national taskforce.
- The role of the utility companies.
- The police perspective.
- The psychology of later life.
- The neighbourhood watch movement.
- The Neighbourhood and Street Wardens Unit.
- The pilot of target hardening devices.
- The taskforce campaigns and material.
- Operation Liberal.

This section summarises the presentations on these subjects. The views expressed are those of the speakers and do not necessarily reflect Home Office policy.

Welcome and aims of the day

Most of the conferences were opened, and chaired by, one of the Crime Reduction Directors from the regions and Wales. In introducing the day, they stressed the importance of the event in promoting the work of the National Taskforce, and raising awareness of distraction burglary with both the public and the many different organisations working with older adults or in the field of crime reduction.

The opening address by Dr Henry Tam, Director of Community Safety and Regeneration for the Government Office for the East of England, exemplifies the points made by all the Crime Reductions Directors:

"To achieve this task different organisations must work together through the crime reduction partnerships. If different agencies continue to work on their own, and are not engaged with the work of their partnerships, then the problems of either duplication or gaps will continue to exist.

Don't let this be a conference that you just attend and then 'get on with the day job', because it has a very practical and focused objective. The impact on tackling distraction burglary will be significantly affected by what we do as a result of this conference. Some of you are already doing excellent work, and some of you are looking at this as a major issue in your strategy for the first time. There is plenty of advice and useful guidance to take back and implement to reduce the chance of innocent victims being harmed and distressed by this type of utterly unacceptable crime."



Speakers at the London Seminar

The nature of distraction burglary – Kelvyn Ashby



Kelvyn Ashby

Kelvyn Ashby, a Detective Superintendent with 30 years service across a number of police forces, was joint manager of the Home Office's National Distraction Burglary Taskforce until March 2002.

The term "distraction burglary" is used because it encapsulates the problem that we are dealing with – someone is distracting a person in order to burgle his or her house. It has been known by other names, for example, "burglary artifice" in the South and "bogus caller crime" in the North.

The offenders will do whatever they can to trick their way into a house. Often they will say they're from the gas, water, or electricity boards, and sometimes social services. They may claim you've won a prize, pose as builders or repairmen, or even as representatives of a political party during an election. They will use every trick in the book to make the offence work.

Distraction burglary offenders can work alone or in teams. They may be male or female, and there have even been examples of children committing the crime.

The majority of victims of this crime are older people. A database run by Operation Liberal in the Midlands indicates the average age of distraction burglary victims to be 81. Three quarters of all victims are female but this could largely be due to the fact that there are many more women in this age group. A large percentage of these vulnerable people live in isolation.

Unlike most burglars, distraction burglary offenders are not opportunists who predominantly commit crimes close to where they live. They are extremely professional criminals who treat their crime as work. They may travel hundreds of miles in a day, committing 20 or 30 offences across as many as 10 or 15 force areas in order to avoid detection. In the Midlands there is a family of travelling people who have committed distraction burglaries and have cash assets of £4.5million, including a 17 year old with a bank balance of £214,000. That's the sort of money being made from these offences.

Many of the victims are from a generation that likes to pay money on demand; they distrust banks and have never had a bank account. They often keep large sums of money in their home, which attracts professional criminals. An offence committed in the Metropolitan Police area involved £100,000 cash being stolen from under a bed and, in another instance, £33,000 was taken in Nottingham.

There appears to be considerable under-reporting and under-recording of distraction burglary in England and Wales. This is illustrated by a surveillance of two offenders in the Midlands who were observed committing 33 offences over two days in three force areas. The next day, when the police visited the victims, it emerged that only two had reported the crime.

The primary reason for this under-reporting is embarrassment on the part of the victim; they believe that it is their fault as they have let the offender in. Another is fear that, should loved ones discover they have been duped so easily, they will be put into residential care. A third reason is that they may not be aware that they have been burgled, or don't discover that anything is missing until too long after the event to make the connection.

A fourth reason is that many older adult victims (sometimes responding to advice from their relatives) are reluctant to become embroiled in a criminal justice system they feel is unsympathetic to the needs of older adults, and are fearful of participating in police identification procedures and giving evidence at court.

There are various reasons for the under-recording of distraction burglary. The offence could reasonably be recorded as deception, theft, burglary or other offences. Even worse, the crime may not be recorded at all, as it can easily be dismissed as a case of an old person being confused, particularly if nothing appears to be missing.

The effects of this crime extend far beyond the loss of property. There is significant evidence that the traumatic experience, of having let individuals into their house only to be conned and burgled, can have a severe effect on an older person's well being. On many occasions officers go back to the victims for the purpose of attending an identity parade, only to find that they are in hospital or have died shortly after the offence.

The successes of Operation Liberal prove that a lot can be done about this crime. It is one of the few offences in which every case has an eyewitness, the victim. In addition, if older people can be made less vulnerable:

- by community partnerships equipping them with the relevant tools;
- by ensuring that they don't keep cash in the house; and
- by making sure that they challenge people on their doorstep and don't open the door,

then this crime can be stopped. Kelvyn urged delegates to push this message and make sure that older people are safer in their homes.

The work of the National Taskforce – Usha Choli



Usha Choli

Usha Choli was Joint Manager of the National Distraction Burglary Taskforce until May 2002. She has 15 years experience of housing, race equality, and crime and disorder issues and was seconded to the Home Office from Ealing Council where she had been a Community Safety Manager.

The Home Office set up the National Distraction Burglary Taskforce in April 2000 after police officers and people who deal with the consequences of the crime raised concerns about its effects on victims. That's why the campaign has been called "They didn't just steal my money".

With a million pounds of funding from the Home Office, and a sponsorship package facilitated by Water UK, the Taskforce forged working relationships with colleagues in the UK and beyond, and drew up a 24-point action plan to achieve six key objectives.

The first objective was to discover the full extent of distraction burglary in order to develop suitable reduction strategies. Supported by a grant from the Home Office, Derbyshire Constabulary set up a database, hosted by Operation Liberal, to track these crimes initially across six police forces.

The second objective was to carry out the work in a sensitive way, so as not to unnecessarily increase the fear of crime. We have consulted older people and found that our video "Closing the Door on Bogus Callers" and our pilot projects have informed people without making them feel more frightened.

The third objective was to raise awareness of the offence among vulnerable people, potential victims, and those who come into contact with them. Neighbourhood Watch groups have been actively involved in working with older people, their families, and the community to prevent the crime rather than just dealing with it retrospectively.

The fourth objective focused on the need to establish more effective partnerships. The Home Office has carried out work on bogus caller crime before, for example the "If In Doubt, Keep Them Out" campaign. However, recently offenders have become much more organised so a far more cohesive approach was needed to tackle the problem. To this end, a three-pronged partnership was developed, consisting of the business sector (utility companies, the British Bankers Association etc), the voluntary sector (Crimestoppers, National Neighbourhood Watch, WRVS etc) and local authorities, the police and specialists in older people's issues (Help the Aged, Age Concern etc).

The fifth objective centred on dealing with crimes once they have been committed. Both reporting and detection levels are not as good as they could be. A major achievement of the Taskforce has

been getting the Home Office to agree, in principle, to creating a separate category for distraction burglary within the police crime recording system. This will provide useful qualitative data about the crime. It is also important to make sure that we share data and investigation expertise across police forces.

The final objective is to try to involve the whole community. The Taskforce has played an important role in bringing together bodies such as Neighbourhood Watch, residents associations, and many other groups. There is an excellent opportunity for integrating older people's safety issues within the crime and disorder prevention strategies. In Coventry, for example, influential figures, including council leaders, the Chief Constable and chief executives, have all been involved in making older people's crime and safety issues part of their city wide Community Plan.

Usha said her first task had been to carry out an audit to find out who was involved in dealing with this crime and to gather examples of good practice. Over 200 responses were received, and it was discovered that many small-scale initiatives were being run. Individual police officers or community workers have been working in isolation, raising resources to improve homes or getting sponsorship to put bolts on doors. However, for a national campaign to be successful, everyone involved must shoulder responsibility.

The Taskforce developed a Good Practice Guide Toolkit containing literature about distraction burglary, samples of devices to help prevent it, and two information videos. In addition, a research programme had been set up to conduct empirical research into the offence.

The first element of the research investigated psychosocial factors that might be associated with victims or repellers of this crime, and also the possible impact that it may have on a victim's health. Prof Chris Hatton of Lancaster University and a team from Bolton, Salford and Trafford Mental Health Partnership, led by a clinical psychologist for older people, Dr Amanda Thornton, jointly conducted this research.

The second element was fieldwork with the Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities of Bristol, which has been led by a community safety project together with Studio 3 Clinical Services. They tested the hypothesis that this is generally a white on white crime, as black and ethnic minority victims are rare. This could potentially be explained by low reporting rates, but the research was attempting to establish whether there are also psychosocial factors to explain this. The researchers also interviewed offenders to build on an earlier study carried out in Leeds.

The results of these two pieces of research will be published in 2003.

Whilst outside the definition of burglary, the issue of bogus trades people was included within our work, and the subject of identity card usage has also been explored. The main focus of this was to ensure that those who call on older people provide prior notification of their visit, rather than putting all the responsibility on the older person.

The role of the utility companies – commercial expertise and involvement

A number of representatives of utility companies spoke. In the case of the water industry as a whole, they were represented by WaterUK on the National Distraction Burglary Taskforce.

The utility companies explained that they recognise a duty of care towards their customers and have an important role to play in tackling distraction burglary.

The crime is a threat to their reputations since distraction burglary offenders often pose as utility company employees. Water companies are required by law to conduct random water sampling, and often no prior notification is given. Other utility companies use cold calling as a way of seeking business.

Many utility companies offer a password system as a tool to combat bogus callers.

In the case of Northumbrian Water, customers can choose a password and register it with the company. The employee can then state the password as soon as the customer answers the door, and it is clear that the caller is genuine. The onus to produce the password should be on the utility company and not the householder.



Adrian Freeland, Head of Security, BT

Some companies, for example BT and Anglian Water, operate identity card schemes. All employees carry an identity card, to be placed where the customer can see it, and customers are encouraged to take the card and use the free-phone number on it. The person at the help-desk can confirm the identity of the person on the doorstep by giving a description or by checking an identity number. The card used by Anglian Water also carries a strip in Braille. Some companies have alternative, larger cards with bigger photographs and fonts for those visually impaired.

A report by OFWAT and the ONCC (OFWAT National Customer Council) last year involved conducting face to face interviews with around 2000 people in England and Wales. A question was asked about 'the awareness of services that help elderly, disabled or special needs customers'. Less than a third of customers appear to realise that they can check the identity of water company staff. However, a number of utility companies pointed out that their employees wear clearly identifiable clothing and often arrive in a company vehicle with their logo clearly displayed.

Utility companies have sponsored numerous projects that have generated awareness of distraction burglary. Encouragingly, a number of companies are working in partnership with organisations such as the RNIB, the RNID, Age Concern, Help the Aged, the NNWA and local "Bobby" Schemes. Posters, stickers and leaflets are used to draw people's attention to the threat of distraction burglary. Utility companies don't want to scare customers so they don't open the door, but they want to give them the tools, the know-how and the confidence to tackle the crime on their doorstep.

The implementation of such initiatives is a step forward in the fight against distraction burglary, and the partnership approach will help them stay ahead of the criminals.

The police perspective – Brian Steele

Brian Steele is the distraction burglary project co-ordinator for Leeds. Previously, he had been a Detective Chief Superintendent in the West Yorkshire Police, and became involved in the issue of distraction burglary while investigating the murder of an 82-year-old lady in 1997. The suspects were put under surveillance and observed performing numerous distraction burglaries.

Brian was concerned that the police, Meals on Wheels, Neighbourhood Watch and Victim Support had not recognised that the lady was at risk and had become a victim of bogus callers. He believes that if these organisations had had systems in place for working together, which involved a greater degree of liaison in such cases, then this crime might have been avoided.



Brian Steele

The experience inspired Brian to approach the Home Office for funding to carry out research into distraction burglary offenders. This involved going into prisons and speaking with them in order to get the criminal's perspective of the crime.

He found that offenders see their crime as a trade. They are proud of their ability to understand the behavioural patterns and thought processes of older people and to manipulate them. The oldest offender interviewed, who was in his 70s, said he'd made "a good living" and that "it's not often you catch me". On many occasions victims are not even aware that they have been burgled until long after the event.

One offender claimed he was only caught because he became dependent on drugs and could no longer be bothered to practice the deception. If it became apparent that the bogus approach was not working he would attempt a 'push through', using violence to get into the house and locate the money.

The offenders' MOs varied greatly, from claiming a roof needed repairing to posing as a representative from a utility company. Other scams include offering cheap materials, such as tarmac, for cash. If the deal is accepted then the offender presumes there is more money in the house, and this information can then be traded with other criminals.

Offenders know that many older people keep cash (even life savings) in their house. The occupant does not have to be distracted for long to allow an accomplice to find the money and get out again.

Brian warned that distraction burglars are attracted to sheltered accommodation as a number of potential victims are gathered in one place. Alternatively offenders may simply drive around looking for likely targets. Typically they looked for likely victims whose alertness had begun to fail (often following the death of a spouse) or for signs of deterioration such as previously well kept properties being allowed to decay as the occupant lost the confidence or ability to manage their affairs.

Brian urged delegates to use the Tackling Distraction Burglary Conferences as an opportunity to learn from the work of the Taskforce and to start planning proper strategies to prevent the crime. He asserted that this would significantly enhance the lives of older people.

The psychology of later life – Dr Amanda Thornton



Dr Amanda Thornton

Research by Dr Amanda Thornton, a clinical psychologist specialising in older people and age issues, provided an insight into what happens on an older person's doorstep.

Currently 12% of Britons are aged over 65, and this proportion is increasing. A woman is likely to live approximately 4 years longer than a man, and there are more than twice as many women over the age of 75 as there are men. Older people are generally living longer and, as a consequence, it is estimated that by 2030 there will be ten million people in this age category.

Older people were brought up and lived at a time when it was routine to conduct legitimate business on the doorstep, with for example, the insurance man or the 'fish man'. Humans are social animals, we are programmed to trust and don't like to offend. People often do not question what someone perceived to be in authority tells them, and this is reflected in doorstep behaviour. When somebody knocks on the door of an older person claiming to be from the gas, electricity or water board it is likely that they will be taken at face value and responded to accordingly.

Society tends to view ageing as something undesirable and sees older people as confused or worthless. This is simply not true. The majority of world leaders are over 60 and there are examples of people in their 90s learning to use the Internet or going to university. This demonstrates that older people can continue learning. However, 6% of people over the age of 65 do have a diagnosable dementia. There might be better ways of getting the message across to people with some memory problems, for example, engaging them in role play on the doorstep rather than just giving a verbal warning and assuming they are going to act on it – we need memorable mediums to reinforce our messages.

Starting in early adulthood there is a general decline in our bodily functions. Statistics show that 10% of your brain cells will have died by the time you are 65. Many older people suffer from short-term memory problems but develop coping mechanisms to deal with any difficulties this may present. The most obvious decline occurs with the sense organs. Hearing and eyesight are the two key areas which particularly affect older people. Colours within the yellow spectrum become more easily distinguishable than those in the green or blue range, so any writing aimed at older people should be produced in black, size 14 font, on a yellow background.

It is hard to find positive images of older people in the media. They are described as lonely, unhappy, set in their ways etc, but none of these stereotypes need apply. There are 95 year olds with no form of illness. We may be disabling older people because of our own fears of what's to come, and the police are as susceptible to holding myths as the rest of society. Older people must be given the chance to give their story of what happens during distraction burglaries; they can and have proved to be valuable witnesses. But they must be given sufficient time and treated sympathetically. Burglary, in whatever form, violates a person's safe space and can be very difficult to cope with.

Distraction burglars prey on the most vulnerable people in our community. They are looking for the biggest possible gain for the least resistance. Offenders are as likely as anyone to hold myths about ageing – for example they may believe that all older people keep money in their homes. They may also believe that 85 year olds will not make good witnesses.

By being aware of our own stereotyping and recognising what older people can do, we can get a lot of information about this crime and help to prevent it.

The neighbourhood watch movement – John Howell



John Howell, Director General, NNWA

The Director General of the National Neighbourhood Watch Association (NNWA), John Howell, is committed to tackling the problem of bogus callers. He is a member of the National Distraction Burglary Taskforce and spoke about NNWA and the part it could play in helping to tackle distraction burglary.

The NNWA has 155,000 co-ordinators and covers 5.5 million homes. It has participated in a number of pilot projects to tackle distraction burglary. It has produced and distributed six and a half million Bogus Caller Fact Sheets, and the Citizenship for Life Skills Project has increased awareness of the crime among school children.

Initially, there were ten pilot projects in the North of England and eleven in the South. Local Neighbourhood Watch representatives agreed with members of the Taskforce that the pilots should be kept low-key to avoid frightening people. Issues such as the ease of entry and exit to estates, identity cards and other preventative measures were all discussed in deciding the strategy for the pilots.

It is known that factors such as untidy gardens, peeling paint and loose guttering give signals to the criminal element that the resident is either aged or disabled. Individual houses were looked at to see what would attract the bogus caller and what could be done to put it right. The householders were then approached with a questionnaire, and their permission gained for work to make their house less vulnerable.

Identity and calling cards can be used to assure people that a caller is genuine, and give the resident something to refer to when called on again. A distraction burglary offender is unlikely to put such a card through a locked door because it may carry forensic evidence, as well as a photograph of the caller, and there is no guarantee that the householder will return it.

Publishing a list of trusty tradesmen may help in tackling distraction burglary. Residents could be sure that it is not a bogus caller at their door, and also be confident that they will not be subject to excessive charges.

By installing the right equipment and being taught how to use it correctly, people can be protected against distraction burglars. A door announcer can talk them through the "Stop, Chain, Check" procedure, and surveys show that having a door bar and spy-hole fitted reduces the resident's fear of crime.

Riddings Neighbourhood Watch in Derbyshire recently gained a police Divisional Commander's commendation for their efforts in working with the Home Office to tackle distraction burglary. The publicity surrounding this has sent out the message that the Neighbourhood Watch are no longer a soft touch.

The Neighbourhood and Street Wardens Unit – John Curtis

Perhaps the most striking fact about a neighbourhood warden scheme is that it's such a simple idea. Get the right people and put them where they're most needed – in the community.

Neighbourhood and Street Wardens are providing a new community service that is accessible to everyone. While possessing no more power than ordinary citizens they are ready to help: watching, listening, reporting, and making their presence felt.

High quality training is equipping them with the skills they need to deal with all kinds of people, and the practical ability to do their job. Good scheme management involves setting targets, supervising and managing the wardens, and taking responsibility for their personal and professional development. They need to have a clear understanding of their roles and the skills to deliver. The Neighbourhood Warden's Unit provides direct support, guidance and training through its technical support team. A programme of evaluation is already under way to establish what works and build a solid base for future development.



John Curtis

Crime prevention and reduction in anti-social behaviour are primary objectives in every warden scheme. The wardens provide a recognisable uniformed presence, which has succeeded in making people feel safer. Much as older people like to see a policeman, they also like to see the community warden. Wardens also meet groups such as Victim Support, the local health and safety project and Help the Aged, and can spread information about offences like distraction burglary.

Wardens are working with the police, Neighbourhood Watch and local authorities in educating people about crime prevention and providing protection advice. One of the schemes has a service van to travel around to fit locks to the doors of people identified by wardens as being particularly vulnerable.

Wardens can play a unique role in community regeneration and development. The service is developing its own unique relationship with the community it serves, and working alongside organisations already involved in community action. The wardens are skilled people who want to be part of a new approach to preventing crime, fostering community spirit, improving the local environment and raising confidence.

The pilot of target hardening devices – Usha Choli/Rosie Erol

Rosie Erol is a Senior Research Officer in the Crime and Policing Group of the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate.

The Taskforce project to test devices was undertaken by Usha Choli and Rosie Erol with 21 local scheme co-ordinators across the country. It became known as the 'Gadget Gran pilot' after a headline on the front page of the Bristol Evening Post. The Taskforce wanted to evaluate the effectiveness of some simple low cost products that it felt could help to prevent distraction burglaries. The question posed was: "Do they work, are people going to use them, and is the approach worthy of inclusion within the Good Practice Guide?"



Rosie Erol

A wide range of devices is available, from simple door view mirrors to sophisticated 24 hour monitoring centres. Cost was a major consideration, as any gadget has to be sufficiently affordable for partnerships to purchase and distribute it in significant numbers. The pilot tested a door view mirror and a door announcer.

The door announcer is fixed near the front door and gives an audible message (of up to 20 seconds duration) to use the door chain or bar and ask for identification. It can be personalised by a friend or relative. It is activated by an infra red sensor and plays as the occupier approaches the door. Units cost approximately £15 and can be connected to the mains or run on batteries.

The door view mirror is a plastic mirror with a yellow stripe across the top saying "Stop Chain Check". Stuck on the wall at eye level by the door and used with a door bar or chain, it enables the occupier to look round the edge of the door to see who is there. This gives an extra sense of security. Units cost approximately 90p each. The door view mirror proved particularly useful for people with narrow hallways.

The pilot took place between February and April 2001. Local partners included Neighbourhood Watch, Age Concern, Help the Aged, local authorities. Crime and disorder reduction partnerships identified the participants – people who had been victims of burglary or distraction burglary, or those perceived to be vulnerable or potential victims.

The pilot involved three visits: the first to install the gadgets; a second cold call; and a final visit to obtain the participants' views at the end of the trial period. On the first two visits the caller observed the person's doorstep behaviour as well as getting feedback to see what their impressions of the project were.

The analysis involved 12 sites and 603 older people. Most were aged between 70 or 80, although many were between 81 and 90. Three quarters of the participants were female. Most lived in council houses, and, of the remainder, equal numbers lived in sheltered housing and in their own homes.

Before the pilot began, 57% of the participants had a spy hole and 86% had either a door chain or bar. However, only 21% reported that they used it as recommended, i.e. putting it on to answer the door. Observations from the pre-installation visit showed that 27% of people used the door chain and 16% requested identification. In 29% of cases, no identification was either requested by the resident or offered by the caller.

In the second visits, on average 26 days later, the caller observed that 50% of people used the door chain or bar and 37% requested identification. In 53% of cases, the caller heard the door announcer operating and, of these, 69% used the door chain or bar and 45% asked for identification. This suggests that the door announcer was having a positive effect. 80% of people stated that the door announcer made them feel safer because they knew they were going to be reminded of how to open the door correctly. 58% said that the mirror gave them a better view of callers.

The positioning of the door announcer is important to prevent it being activated accidentally. It is recommended that the announcer be set at 4ft above the floor and behind the door. Subsequent to the trials, some changes were made to the PIR sensor to narrow its range, and a longer 'lead-in time' of 55 seconds was set before the message reactivated.



Cedric Boston led on the largest pilot site, working with police, council, Age Concern and district nurses

The taskforce campaigns and materials – Usha Choli



Sally Gronow and Usha Choli at the Swansea Seminar

A major output of the Taskforce's work was to produce a good practice guide toolkit consisting of two videos, an information folder and sample gadgets. This, Usha explained, was necessary in sustaining the campaign message and in providing practical help for practitioners working to make older people's lives safer.

The first video (featuring Annette Crosbie) is designed to inform older people without instilling a sense of fear. It runs through the "Stop, Chain, Check" procedure and reassures older people that if they're not happy about letting a caller in then they can simply shut the door.

This was tested by getting older people's views; they all agreed that the messages were portrayed clearly without unduly frightening them. This video has also been translated into 6 languages so older people from all communities can benefit from its safety messages. The Taskforce thanks Mr and Mrs Shipton, who allowed their home to be used for filming.

The second video is slightly harder hitting and is designed to illustrate to people who work with older people how they can help tackle this crime.

The information folder contains the Taskforce's research, training material, and role-play sessions for groups of older people.

The third element of the good practice guide consists of samples of gadgets to help prevent distraction burglary: a door bar, a door view mirror, a door scope, a spy-hole, and a door announcer. The Taskforce recommends that, wherever possible, door bars rather than chains be installed because people with arthritic fingers find chains difficult to use. The door scope is a large spy-hole that magnifies the image to give people with poorer eyesight a better view of who is on their doorstep.

The toolkit has been widely distributed – over 6,000 have now been sent out. Remaining stocks are limited and further distribution has to be restricted to existing orders, but the kits should be accessible through partnerships. The printed good-practice material is also on the Crime Reduction website at www.crimereduction.gov.uk/burglary48.htm and copies of the two videos are available from Prolog on 0870 241 4680.

Also available (in limited quantities) are posters, leaflets (including a large print version) and door stickers. Exhibition material and banners bearing this logo can be loaned via the Crime Reduction Teams at the regional government offices.

Key organisations and individuals in local communities should be encouraged to become involved in initiatives. The issue of distraction burglary should be integrated within the community plan for the local area. Remember that whilst our main target group remains older people, the doorstep etiquette and target hardening work is applicable to everyone.

Usha reported that practitioners have found the toolkit and materials practical and very useful, with health care professionals also using them.

Operation Liberal – Kelvyn Ashby

Prior to 1998, when Operation Liberal was set up, there was a detection rate of only 3% of distraction burglaries in Derbyshire. Since the operations were started 22% of all distraction burglaries have been detected, and the aim is to increase this further.

Operation Liberal provides for the first time a central database of distraction burglary offenders, which is available to the police. It allows for an inter-force analysis of distraction burglary by enabling the forces involved to obtain information on offenders from other constabularies. It includes the Cambridgeshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire, South Yorkshire, Warwickshire, West Midlands, Lincolnshire and West Mercia forces and is being expanded.

The computer system contains crime pattern analysis and over 1500 photographs of offenders. It allows operators to electronically import information, for example, the psychological profile of offenders and compare it with that from other forces.

The sharing of information is vital. By pooling together their findings, crime scene officers, fingerprint officers and liaison officers at forensic laboratories have assisted in detecting offences. An open meeting held at Leicester Police HQ every two months also aids this process.

It is known that a sizeable percentage of distraction burglary offenders are itinerants (often shunned by the travelling community for their behaviour), or people who are dependent on illegal drugs. They may have a predetermined amount of money that they want to 'earn' each day, and may go through 10 to 15 addresses to achieve this.

The preparatory work of distraction burglars can often provide vital clues to their identities: 20% of all marks left by offenders are found on the front doors of dwellings. For instance, they may look, or even smell, through letterboxes to determine whether the occupants of the house fall within the vulnerable category.

Distraction burglary offenders often have no previous convictions. They know how to beat police tracing, for example, by turning off their mobile telephones to avoid a cell site analysis, and use multiple identities to hinder examination of bank accounts. However, in identity parades, witnesses regularly identify the offenders. In one case, a woman immediately identified a man three years after the offence.

Part of the aim of Operation Liberal was to increase public awareness and strengthen media relations. This has led to an increase in reporting of the crime, and some offenders have received a sentence of 12 years. Whilst crime reduction rates initially decline because of the increased reporting, it gives the police a better idea of the actual crime rate.

Section 3

Local Initiatives

This section deals with issues raised within the 'Soapbox Sessions' of the regional conferences. Dedicated to sharing details of initiatives and projects within each region, the contributions took the form of formal presentations or short speeches by delegates. There was also an opportunity to provide a written submission. We have endeavoured to pick out in this section the main ideas that have not been covered elsewhere in this report. Again, the views and ideas expressed here do not necessarily represent Home Office policy.

Effective investigation and prosecution

Valuable information, such as a description of the offenders, any vehicles involved and the MO used, can often be gained from the victim, though not always on the first visit – investigators should be prepared to return a few days later when the immediate shock has subsided. An analyst will then identify common patterns occurring in other police force areas. When particular trends are noticed, bulletins are sent out to the local sub-divisional operational policing units. By sharing information in this way it has been possible to target individual offenders and arrest them.

Covert cameras have been used to film distraction burglary offenders committing the crime, and their photographs have been put onto a database. This information has led to numerous convictions.

By using information from several police force areas the Crown Prosecution Service was able to charge two females, who had posed as flower sellers, with a string of distraction burglary offences. They received much larger sentences than if they had been found guilty of just a single offence.

In Leeds, a video has been produced for police officers to illustrate good practice in investigating distraction burglaries, especially in the style of interview of traumatised older adults, and best practice technique to facilitate recovery from the impact of crime.

Police officers should be encouraged to take 'impact statements' so the courts can be given a view of the tremendous effect that this type of crime is likely to have on an older victim.

In Leeds, a detective works full-time on visiting the scenes of distraction burglaries. A video has been produced by the Leeds project and is played to vulnerable householders in the local area to educate them and modify their doorstep behaviour.

The appointment of an Investigations Officer by Richmond Housing Partnership is an acknowledgement that they, as a landlord, have an obligation to tackle crime on their estates to ensure the security of their tenants.



Delegates sharing ideas

Invaluable Trace have arranged with the Home Office to waive their fees for carrying out searches for property taken in distraction burglaries that may come up for auction.

The Home Office Prolific Offenders Working Group is doing a lot of work to develop systems aimed specifically at the top 3% of offenders, as it is estimated that they are committing upwards of 30% of offences. People who fall within the target group will come under a surveillance regime involving the Probation Service, the Prison Service and the Police Service.

Any distraction burglary prevention strategy must take into account the links with bogus property repairers. Trading Standards have produced a toolkit containing the best initiatives to tackle bogus traders, and this information is available on the Trading Standards and Home Office Websites.

Target hardening

Groups such as Care and Repair, Age Concern, Help the Aged, local neighbourhood watches and community safety officers have all been involved in repairing outward signs that the resident may be a target for distraction burglary – for example, by fixing fences and painting exterior walls.

“Bobby Van” Schemes have also been responsible for carrying out important target hardening work, for example, by fitting locks and spy-holes in the homes of people who have become victims of crime.

In Brent, there is an ‘elders voice’ group that doesn’t charge for installing locks and bolts in the homes of older people, regardless of their age or savings. One of the group’s aims is to make older people aware of all the other schemes that are available.

Gadgets, materials and resistance techniques

SeniorLink is an offshoot of Help the Aged, which provides an immediate response home monitoring alarm system. It is linked to a call centre operating 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and can put the older person directly in touch with a Help the Aged representative. For most the unit is free and all they have to pay is the ongoing weekly rental cost. They have the security of a door button and a pendant around their neck, which can be used to raise the alarm.

Many older people worry that having a community alarm is a step towards their removal to a nursing home and the loss of their independence. This feeling can be reinforced if alarms publicity focuses on emergency situations and uses images of the very elderly. Help the Aged see SeniorLink as helping to strengthen independence rather than making vulnerable people more dependent. It encourages clients to call for reassurance if they are fearful, or lonely and just wish to speak to someone.

A SeniorLink unit, fitted by a HandyVan or a partner organisation such as the local police project or voluntary organisation, is linked to the client’s phone and connected to Help the Aged SeniorLink Immediate Response Centre (which has direct links to police control centres). A feature of the package is that a ‘door alert’ button is fitted beside the client’s front door. When suspicious of callers, the client can press the door alert, which triggers the unit, thereby putting the client in immediate voice contact with an operator. The operator can give advice and support on “Stop, Chain, Check” lines, and can initiate a search on the caller’s credentials, for example, by phoning the caller’s claimed firm, all whilst the caller is on the doorstep.

Under the Leeds distraction burglary initiative a number of households in Leeds have been fitted with a remote door opening system provided by In Touch UK Security at Blackpool. These allow an operator at a central control centre to talk to the caller and remotely open the door if they are satisfied that the caller is genuine. Early indications are that the system has prevented a number of crimes and resulted in a heightened sense of security within the households concerned.

Door announcers can be made more effective by having a familiar voice relaying the "Stop, Chain, Check" message, for example, a favourite grandchild saying, "Put the chain on, and don't forget to ask for identification".

Another potentially useful gadget is an Identislot, which allows the caller to pass identification through to the householder without them having to open the door. The larger cards, that some callers carry for the visually impaired, may not fit through this device. "We Check ID" stickers can also be displayed on or near front doors. However, in both cases it is recommended that they should be used in all houses in an area or not used at all. Otherwise they can be used to identify those who may be vulnerable.

The "Stop, Chain, Check" message can be displayed on plastic tags known as 'wobblers'. These are to be stuck above front door handles so that they must be lifted, and the message seen, every time the door is opened. Printing the "Stop, Chain, Check" information on a pension book holder can also be an effective way of communicating the message.

Leaflets listing various utility companies, with spaces for the householder to fill in the relevant account numbers, can be designed to be stuck on the inside of a front door. These can be useful in ascertaining whether a doorstep caller claiming to be from a utility company is genuine.

"Bogus Crime Free Zone" signs have been put up in areas that have attracted distraction burglary offenders. These raise awareness of the crime, and highlight to bogus callers that the authorities will take an interest in any cold callers.

In shared entry accommodation, signs such as "Polite Notice to Callers – Do not expect to be allowed in by anyone other than the person you are visiting", and "Polite Notice to Residents – Think before you let anybody in, you may be putting other residents at risk" can help to draw attention to the threat posed by bogus callers.

Older people can deter potential bogus callers by shouting something like "It's alright, I'll get this one" when going to answer the door, or by hanging hats on hooks in the hallway – anything to give the impression that there is somebody else in the house.

Communication and raising awareness

Victims of crime should be made aware that they can talk to Crimestoppers free and completely anonymously. In many cases, repeat offences are a result of the trusting nature of the householder rather than any weakness of the physical security, so Crimestoppers have put out press releases to reinforce the safety and awareness message about the dangers of allowing strangers into your home.

Community Safety Partnerships and other multi-agency groups, such as police and community police consultative groups, can assist in finding solutions to local problems. Initiatives can be emphasised through the local press and at local meetings. The information must then be filtered down until it reaches the local residents' associations and Neighbourhood Watches.

The Data Link initiative brings together partners from the crime and health sectors, often led by Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinators. The idea is to place personal and health information in a tub in the freezer. A notice should be put up to make people aware that this information can be accessed in the event of an emergency.

Schemes such as mobile crime prevention buses can be an effective way of targeting information to the public in specific areas. Letters should be sent to residents telling them that the bus will be in their road on a certain day, and volunteers can encourage people to take an interest, or even help them to and from the bus.

The Trading Standards call centre in Hertfordshire has a specific phone number for their doorstep initiative. If there is a problem that requires urgent action then an officer can be contacted almost instantly.

In Waltham Forest, an excellent project to tackle distraction burglary resulted in the production of a video (in conjunction with the local college), and also involved school children in raising awareness of the crime. They mounted a poster campaign and also wrote a play around the "Stop, Chain, Check" message, which has been performed to various audiences.

The Feelin' Good Theatre Company, based in Leeds, also developed a play around bogus caller issues. They perform it in schools, and to the general public as well as older people, to raise awareness of distraction burglary. Their set consists of a door through which they play out various doorstep scenarios. In the first two sketches the door chain is not put on and caller walks in easily or distracts the older person outside. There is then a break for discussion before the last four sketches. These are positive and illustrate how to deal correctly with doorstep callers. The aim is to give the older person the confidence to deny entry, or to tell the caller to return when someone else is present.

The First Checkpoint scheme in Leeds (based on one in Sussex) aims to recommend trustworthy contractors to elderly people. To be accepted onto the list the contractors must agree to a full check of any previous convictions and Trading Standards checks. They must also provide references and agree to on-site visits. Evaluation forms are completed after every job to ensure that standards are maintained.

Also in Leeds, the police and utility companies have developed a doorstep behaviour protocol that each utility representative must go through before they enter a house. Brian Steele's research indicates that the cold calling practices used by the public utilities and other organisations can present a cloak of legitimacy under which much bogus offending is committed. In Leeds, the utilities and other partner organisations have developed a protocol whereby the company representative visiting a household proactively accepts responsibility for proving their bona fides, rather than waiting for the occupant to request such proof. The protocol includes each representative carrying a second larger identification card which can be more easily read by older eyes.

Care Direct is a one-stop-shop for the needs of older people and their carers. They can ring a free-phone number for anything from getting their curtains cleaned, to having a roof tile replaced or any other query.

The work of the Taskforce has also encouraged older people themselves to get involved. The following poem was devised by retired housing officer Ted Phillips and has been incorporated within awareness raising events for older people.

The Pensioners Front Door Plan

By Ted Phillips

When you attain the grand status, of Pensioner
You should enjoy life, while you can
And keep your home, secure and safe
By following, **The pensioners front door plan**

If you are between sixty and ninety, years of age
Or perhaps, even just a few years more
You must protect yourself, from rogues and thieves
And, **Put a chain or bar on your front door**

When there comes a knock, at your front door
There's no need for you, to rush or strain
Remember the message, **STOP, CHAIN, CHECK,**
And then just, **Put on the bar or chain**

You must never trust strangers, when they call
And even though, you may find it quite hard
Tell them politely, "I will not open my door
But, **You may leave your calling card**"

There's no need, for much conversation
With those strangers, at your front door
So just focus your thoughts, on saying Goodbye
And then, **You don't have to speak, any more**

Should your callers use, a persuasive tone
And say, an urgent entry, they have to obtain
Do not be fooled, By their tricks and deceit
Just, **Remember to keep on the bar or the chain**

If you want to stay happy and safe in your home
Take these words, by the scruff of the neck
"Ensure that all doors, are securely locked"
"Always put into action, STOP, CHAIN, CHECK."

Section 4

Media Coverage

The conferences received a great deal of interest and publicity, and local newspapers and other media were generally very positive and helpful. Distraction burglary as a subject is likely to generate press interest and local distraction burglary campaigns should always consider using the press to generate awareness and get the message across to potential victims, and those who are in contact with them.

It is important in doing so, however, that emphasis is laid on not raising the fear of crime but benefiting from the advice and guidance available to help ensure personal security. There is no reason in principle why the press should not give out general advice and guidance on the subject provided, in doing so, anti-crime operations are not compromised. Local press publicity can also be targeted at offenders to send a message that things are going to be made more difficult for them, their activities are going to be made more risky, and the rewards will be correspondingly smaller.

The following is a summary and some examples of the coverage given to the campaign and the regional conferences.

Newspapers

- Papers in every region were invited to regional events to launch the distraction burglary good practice guide toolkits, or to attend the regional conferences. Advance briefing secured extensive coverage in many local papers – too many to name.
- Many papers ran extra stories about the Taskforce itself, working with local water companies and utilities companies to solve the problem.
- Some of the larger regional papers ran a named article from the Minister of State, John Denham, often using it as an endorsement of their own campaigns.
- A number of papers followed this up with reminder messages over the Christmas period to keep an eye out for the safety of elderly neighbours and relatives.
- The “Stop, Chain, Check” message was covered in almost every regional newspaper. Many included cut-out reminders on avoiding becoming a doorstep victim.
- Several papers were prompted to run or continue with campaigns of their own, covering the issue from a local perspective, naming victims and typical tricks used and promoting the advice from the Taskforce and police on preventative methods. We also worked with the following papers on endorsing their campaigns.

Cambridge Evening News
Colchester Evening Gazette
Essex Chronicle
The Gloucester Citizen
Grimsby Telegraph
Norwich Evening News

Nottingham Evening Post
Reading Evening Post
Southend Evening Echo
South Essex Evening Echo
South Wales Echo
Yorkshire Evening Post

Examples of coverage

The Northern Echo – Crackdown on Scourge of Bogus Callers 16/03/02

“Ways to stamp out the scourge of bogus callers who con their way into victims homes in the North East were placed in focus yesterday.

Experts met at Sunderland’s Stadium of Light to hear how the Distraction Burglary Taskforce is working with utility companies to combat the crime.

A national toolkit, advising on best practice, doorstep etiquette for utility workers and outlining devices that can be installed in homes was unveiled at the conference.

Task Force joint manager Usha Choli said “Typically these are where intruders gain access to houses posing as utility workers or trades-people while they, or an accomplice, steal valuables from old and vulnerable people.”

Northumbrian Water operations Director Graham Neave said “We are determined to do all we can to combat the crime. The water company seldom needs access to a customer’s property without prior arrangement and, if anyone has doubts about a caller’s identity, they should ring the customer centre on 0845717 1100 to check before letting anyone in.”

Grimsby Telegraph – New Campaign aims to close the door on distraction burglaries 05/01/02

“Members of Grimsby’s burglary reduction partnership recently spoke at the launch of a Home Office campaign to close the door on bogus callers... the aim of the new campaign is to tackle bogus callers and distraction burglars and help older people feel safer in their homes.

Crime Reduction Director for Yorkshire and the Humber region, Greg Dyche, hosted the launch of the Tackling Distraction Burglary Crime Campaign at Doncaster Racecourse. He said “We all have a responsibility to ensure older people in our communities feel safe in their own homes. Distraction Burglary is a crime that will not be tolerated. Family members and neighbours can also help the vulnerable to protect themselves by reminding them of the simple ‘Stop, Chain, Check’ message. By working together, legitimate callers, carers and older people themselves can all help to keep the door firmly closed to bogus callers.”

Express and Echo (Exeter) United Effort Set to End Distraction Burglars Antics 13/02/02

“Opportunities are fast running out for thieves who prey on the elderly in Devon, thanks to a united campaign against distraction burglaries.

A new nationwide initiative involving all sectors in the community was unveiled in Exeter yesterday in a bid to end the trauma and humiliation suffered by the elderly victims of cowardly con men.

Over 200 representatives from health authorities, social services, organisations for the elderly, the police, trading standards and victim support agencies from across the South West gathered near Exeter to share ideas on the best way of tackling the problem.

The agencies will now promote the advice and security measures to those at risk.

Heartland Evening News – Together we can beat the Conmen – 18/01/02

“An increasing problem with conmen duping pensioners in their own homes has sparked pioneering action to crack down on the menace. The Tackling Distraction Burglary Conference for the West Midlands took place this week and revealed some startling facts.

The purpose of the conference was to highlight a new venture spearheaded by the Home Office to draw together a host of agencies to tackle distraction burglary. This means that Warwickshire Police, councils, charities and private companies such as Severn Trent Water can work together to battle the conmen.

Television

- Television coverage focussed mainly on the regional conferences, typically with reporters finding a local victim of distraction burglary, highlighting the conference and conducting interviews with members of the Taskforce, or regional crime reduction directors.
- This is a more difficult subject for television to cover, because it is hard for them to find victims who will talk on camera.
- News programmes across the country featured the conferences.

Radio

Local radio stations were particularly active in covering the regional conferences – where a range of ‘voices’ was gathered together. The real benefit of radio is the opportunity throughout the day to repeat the key messages to listeners, and also deliver practical advice. A clip on BBC radio for example, might run once ‘live’ in a programme, and then 4 or 5 times in news bulletins. Members of the Taskforce (police officers, Age Concern, water companies etc) and Regional Crime Directors all contributed to numerous interviews, and had the opportunity to highlight regional initiatives.

Section 5

Concluding Remarks

The conferences and regional launches were well received by delegates, with many agreeing to develop local projects. Evidence shows that this has already started, for example, Coventry and Birmingham each held local events within a week of the West Midlands conference, and within three weeks partnership efforts contributed to the arrest of three offenders and the detection of at least 20 distraction crimes in the area.

Each conference provided the opportunity for other partners to share their expertise and services to the diverse audiences. These included: the National Neighbourhood Watch Association (who provided display materials at these events), Tunstall Telecom, Identislot and Solon Security.

We encourage you to integrate your efforts in raising awareness of the “Stop, Chain, Check” message within existing services. For example, you can tackle distraction burglary by building in measures within your area’s Community Plan, Policing Plan, Crime and Disorder Strategy action plan, Housing strategy, National Service Framework for Older People plans, and anywhere that the issues of safety and crime against older and vulnerable people are dealt with.

The Home Office can (subject to availability) provide support and materials to managers and practitioners to help them in their work:

- Videos (including foreign language and subtitled versions)
- “How to Beat the Bogus Caller” leaflets (standard and larger font versions)
- “Stop, Chain, Check” door stickers (standard and large versions)
- Posters
- Exhibition materials (to be loaned from regional Crime Reduction Teams)

Remember: working in partnership can help tackle distraction burglary from different directions. Here is a list of just some of the organisations and groups which might be part of your local partnership. Many are already involved at different levels in combating distraction burglary. Even if they do not have a specific role in your plans they may be able to provide valuable advice:

- Police
- Local utility companies (water, gas, electricity)
- Telephone companies
- Banks
- Building Societies
- Crimestoppers
- Neighbourhood Watch
- Women’s Royal Voluntary Service
- Help the Aged
- Crime Concern
- Age Concern

Safe
Local organisations/charities providing security improvements
Security companies
Health service
Health trusts
GPs
Local authorities
Social Services
Meals on Wheels
Trading Standards Institute
Trader/builder assurance organisations
Housing Associations
Local Authority Housing Department
Chartered Institute of Housing
Faith groups
Schools
Libraries
Drama groups

This list is not intended to be exhaustive. Its purpose is simply to give pointers to the wide range of organisations that may be able to offer help.

Section 6

Acknowledgements

The Taskforce would like to thank its staff, particularly Usha Choli, for all the work that went into arranging and running the conferences. We would also like to thank all the speakers involved for providing valuable time and expertise at the conferences. Many other delegates made interesting and useful contributions for which we thank them. Those who spoke included (Note: the names of some speakers who spoke at more than one event appear only once):

London – 13 November 2001

Usha Choli	Home Office Distraction Burglary Task Force
Kelvyn Ashby	Home Office Distraction Burglary Task Force
Adrian Freeland	Head of Security, British Telecom
Ellie Roy	Crime Reduction & Social Inclusion Director, Government Office for London
John Howell	Director General, National Neighbourhood Watch Assoc.
PC Peter Waine	Harrow Metropolitan Police
Brian Steele	Co-ordinator, Leeds Distraction Burglary Initiative
Dr Amanda Thornton	Salford Mental Health Services
Cedric Boston	Operations Director, Richmond Housing Partnership
Duncan Arjoon-Matthews	Community Safety Officer, London Borough of Brent
Commander Bob Quick	Metropolitan Police
Susan King OBE	Head of Neighbourhood Wardens Unit, now ODPM (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister)
David Walker	Studio 3 Research Team
Nazia Durrani	Studio 3 Research Team
Isabel Cross	'Crimestoppers' Eastern Development Manager

Yorkshire & the Humber (Doncaster) – 22 November 2001

Greg Dyche	Crime Reduction Director, Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber
Cheryl Wright	Community Affairs Manager, Yorkshire Water
Shahbaz Ramzan	Community Safety Officer, Sheffield City Council
Cheryl Barrott	Older Peoples Project Officer, Sheffield City Council
Phil Spikesley	Burglary Understanding Reduction Programme, Grimsby
Ian Beaumont	Burglary Understanding Reduction Programme, Grimsby
Nigel Bonson	DTLR (now ODPM)
Dr Rosie Erol	Senior Research Officer, Crime and Policing Group of the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate

NW England (Bolton) – 4 December 2001

Colin Cooper	Crime Reduction Team, Government Office for the North West
Pat Waywell	Service Development Manager, United Utilities
Caroline Malone	Salford Mental Health Services
Frank Smith	Lancashire Neighbourhood Watch
Conal Devitt	Group Manager Community Safety, Liverpool City Council
ACC Alan Bridge	Greater Manchester Police
Giselle Bawden	Neighbourhood & Street Wardens Scheme Manager, Longsight, Manchester

West Midlands (Birmingham) – 16 January 2002

Margaret Geary	Crime Reduction Director, Government Office for the West Midlands
Tim Healey	Better Government for Older People Manager, Coventry City Council
Insp Mandy Mason	Action Against Crime, West Midlands Police
Supt John Moss	Staffordshire Police
John Curtis	Neighbourhood & Street Wardens Unit, Home Office & ODPM

East Midlands (Mansfield) – 22 January 2002

Barry North	Crime Reduction Team, Government Office for the East Midlands
Fraser Pithie	Customer Contact Manager, Severn Trent Water
Dr Melanie Bash	Nottinghamshire Health Care NHS Trust
DI Pat Parry	Operation Liberal, Derbyshire Constabulary
Hedley Walker	Riddings Neighbourhood Watch
Richard Childs	Chief Constable, Lincolnshire Police
Clare Mallon	Manor & Castle Trust

East of England (Newmarket) – 5 February 2002

Dr Henry Tam	Director for Community Safety & Regeneration, Government Office for East of England
Louise Muntsfield	} Anglian Water
Sara Rowland	
Debbie Weston	} Cambridgeshire Constabulary
Ian Crowther	
Shirley Simpson	} Trust Manager, Cambridgeshire Bobby Scheme
Terry Turner	
Julian Gregory	
DCI Mark Cordell	
	Crime Reduction Team, Government Office of the East of England
	Suffolk Constabulary

South West (Exeter) – 12 February 2002

Paul Rowlandson	Crime Reduction Director, Government Office for the South West
DS Paul Bean	} Devon & Cornwall Constabulary, Operation Litotes
Sgt Steve Beety	
Gill Gillvray	Co-ordinator of the Four Lanes Project
PC Jerry Campion	Kerrier Police Community Team
Jennifer Lyon	Deputy Project Director, Department of Health 'Care Direct'
Andy Saunders	Dorset Police Partnership Trust
Claire Hughes	Plymouth City Council

Wales (Swansea) – 15 February 2002

David A'Herne	Crime Reduction Director, National Assembly for Wales
Sally Gronow	Customer Policy Manager, Dwr Cymru Welsh Water
John Munton	Cardiff Bogus Caller Campaign
Brian John	Neath Port Talbot Datalink Project
ACC Tony Rogers	Specialist Crime, South Wales Police
Susan Cousins	Safer Merthyr Tydfil
Insp Mike Davies	Gwent Police
Terry Flynn	Chairman, South Wales Neighbourhood Watch

South East (Bexhill) – 27 February 2002

Hugh Marriage	Crime Reduction Director, Government Office for the South East
Roger Cohen	Principal Trading Standards Officer, East Sussex
Helen McAndrew	Project Manager, South East Trading Standards

South East (Stoke Poges) – 5 March 2002

Hugh Marriage	Crime Reduction Director, Government Office for the South East
Paul Verner	Business Development Manager, Powergen
Helen Schofield	London Community and Police Consultative Groups Association

North East (Sunderland) – 15 March 2002

Ron Hogg	Assistant Chief Constable, Durham Police
Chris Goffey	Television presenter
Alan Fittes	Water Network Rehabilitation Manager, Northumbrian Water
Ian James	Clinical Psychologist, Newcastle Centre for the Health of the Elderly
Frank Smith	National Neighbourhood Watch Association
Ch Insp Andy Reddick	Northumbria Police
Julie Edgar	Neighbourhood & Street Wardens Unit, North Tyneside Council
Ted Phillips	Retired Housing Officer

Our thanks also to the following for chairing conference sessions:

- Ellie Roy, Crime Reduction Director for London
- Paul Rowlandson, Crime Reduction Director for the South West
- David A'Herne, Crime Reduction Director for Wales
- Margaret Geary, Crime Reduction and Social Inclusion Director for the West Midlands
- Henry Tam, Director, Community Safety and Regeneration, Government Office for the East of England
- Julian Gregory, Crime Reduction Team, Government Office for East of England
- Barry North, Crime Reduction Team, Government Office for the East Midlands
- Chris Goffey, Television presenter
- Steve Wilkes, Head of Burglary and Business Crime Section, Home Office
- Hugh Marriage, Crime Reduction Director for the South East

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