

Electricity meter fraud - don't get caught out (17 June 2011)

Residents in Southend are being warned not to buy electricity top-ups from bogus callers as part of a nationwide campaign to improve awareness.

Criminals are knocking door-to-door offering what seems like a good deal - £50 worth of electricity top-up for about £25. But energy companies can tell when meters have been topped up illegally and customers who top up in this way will end up paying twice for their energy - once to the criminal and then again to their electricity supplier.

A nationwide campaign, Top-up Safe, is alerting customers to the risks of purchasing illegal top-ups on the doorstep. Energy companies never sell electricity top-ups in this way, only through official outlets PayPoint, Payzone and the Post Office. Awareness of the fraud in certain hotspots, especially London, has brought crime rates down, but the crime is spreading to other new areas.

Christine McGourty, Director of Energy UK, which runs the Top-up Safe campaign, said: "Energy companies are working together to tackle prepayment fraud under the national 'Top-up Safe' communications campaign. It has been successful; however criminals will always be looking for new opportunities and new areas.

"The people selling these illegal top-ups are criminals and although it might seem like an easy way to save money, not only will you be letting a criminal into your home, you will end up having to pay twice for your energy. The only people benefitting from this scam are the fraudsters and the only way to get the energy you pay for is to buy top-ups from official outlets PayPoint, Payzone or the Post Office."

Mick Holland, of Southend Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, said: "Often these organised groups are responsible for targeting the most vulnerable and hard pressed members of our community and we all need to do everything we can to prevent this. Such criminality also leads to higher costs for the public."

The industry's national 'Top-up Safe' campaign includes a dedicated website at www.top-upsafe.com. Customers can contact their energy company direct or call Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.