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Leave Rogue Traders Out In the Cold: Top Five Tips *Checktrade.com boss Kevin Byrne provides advice on protecting your home*

With temperatures plummeting and the Met Office issuing severe weather warnings across the country, Checktrade.com MD Kevin Byrne provides his top five tips to help savvy consumers protect their homes against catastrophes.

Kevin hopes to help prevent a scourge of rogue traders preying on victims caught off guard by bad weather. He comments: “A harsh winter, such as has been predicted for this year, can trigger a plethora of household problems, while icy temperatures exacerbate even the smallest issue.

“Rogue traders up and down the country will be ready to pounce on the vulnerable at the first signs of ice or snow. If homeowners are aware of the most common problems and take pre-emptive action, this will counteract the immediate threat of cowboys - and leave *them* out in the cold!”

1. Wrap pipes

This advice is particularly pertinent for external pipes, but also applies to pipes in unheated areas such as garages and loft spaces. As temperatures drop, the water in pipes freezes and expands which can cause pipes to burst.

This can be quickly and easily avoided by wrapping exposed pipes. Lagging material is the most effective covering and can be purchased from all good DIY shops. However, wrapping pipes in any material you have to hand will still offer some degree of insulation, particularly thick, warm materials such as towels.

2. Bleed radiators

If you notice that your radiator is cold at the top, but warm at the bottom then it needs to be ‘bled’. This process will remove any trapped air that is causing the cold patches. Use a radiator key to open valves until there is a hissing sound from escaping air. Close the valves as soon as water begins to drip out.

Radiators should be bled at least once a year to keep central heating systems performing at their best. If they require bleeding more frequently, seek professional assistance.

3. Annual boiler service

An annual boiler service is a legal requirement for landlords, and it’s highly recommended for homeowners too. A boiler service can highlight underlying problems and minor faults, reducing repair costs and slashing fuel bills by ensuring the boiler runs efficiently. Boiler services also minimise carbon monoxide risks.

As central heating becomes invaluable in winter, booking your boiler service well in advance can save a lot of stress, heartache and cold evenings.

4. Clear guttering

In an ideal world, removing debris from guttering is a task for the start of winter as it is a great opportunity to clear away leaves that have fallen during autumn. As we have had an unseasonably long summer and autumn, now is a good time to get the job done. Clearing guttering before any snowfall will significantly ease the drainage of melted snow, thus avoiding any blockages and subsequent flooding.

5. Have a handy man list at the ready

Even the most well prepared householder may find themselves needing a professional helping hand, from a snapped key in a frozen lock to warped and swollen exterior doors. In order to avoid falling victim to a rogue trader, prepare a list of trusted professionals to call on.

By searching Checkatrade.com, you will have quick and easy access to qualified, monitored and vetted traders from all sectors.

Hopefully, you won't need to use the list, but it's better to be prepared in advance than caught on the back foot in a crisis.

-ENDS-

Notes to editors:

Every customer feedback is read by Checkatrade.com before being made live. So far this year 55% of all customer feedback forms have been independently spot checked and verified to make sure the jobs and rating are genuine. Each month more than **500,000** people visit the website to find a trusted trader.

Checkatrade.com:

Checkatrade helps combat the UK's rogue trader problem by continuously vetting and monitoring local tradespeople such as builders, plumbers and electricians as well as service providers. The idea was born in 1998 after a tornado hit the small West Sussex town of Selsey. Traders poured in from across the country. Unfortunately, some ripped off the inhabitants of the town. Local businessman, Kevin Byrne, realised there was nowhere to check out the traders' credentials and the company that became Checkatrade was formed.

Since then, Checkatrade has grown to employ **120 staff** with a turnover in excess of **£7.5m**. It has over **11,800** genuine trade members, growing by an average of **300** new members every month. Over the past 12 months, Checkatrade-certified tradesmen carried out a combined total of **£1.4b** worth of work, with complaints at just **one in 215**, compared to the national average of one in four.

Midnight

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Linda Barker, one of the UK's best-known interior designers and famous for shows such as *60 Minute Makeover* and the BBC's *Changing Rooms* has teamed up with Checkatrade.com. She said: "Checkatrade.com is by far the best service I've found to help keep the good guys in business and keep the cowboys out. The website is updated constantly and allows everyone to share recommendations and warnings."

For more information visit www.checkatrade.com