

Get trust back in the bag

Charity bag crime is escalating dramatically as organised criminals move in, writes **Alistair McLean**

■ AT A CHARITY CLOTHING COLLECTIONS SYMPOSIUM HOSTED BY THE INSTITUTE OF

Fundraising and Fundraising Standards Board (FRSB) last week, the full scale of charity bag crime was revealed. In one sample of charity bags, the Charity Retail Association reported that as many as 10% were found to be bogus.

The National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB) confirmed that bogus collections are carried out by organised criminals, with links to money laundering, human trafficking and violent offences. Charity bag theft and bogus collections have both increased substantially.

In the past year, public complaints to the FRSB about bogus goods collections have increased by 100%. The problem has now become so widespread that charities are losing millions of pounds each year and public confidence in this form of charitable giving has taken a battering.

Speaking at the symposium, minister for civil society Nick Hurd said the key issue with bogus collections was “public trust”. He said: “It is estimated that fraud and theft of goods is costing charities anything from £15m to as much as £50m a year. Perhaps even greater cost is the loss of public confidence as charity supporters express growing concerns and fears about donating goods.”

But a number of initiatives are underway to minimise crime, develop best practice and rebuild donor confidence. The NFIB has established a charity desk that analyses intelligence on bogus and stolen collections, while the Trading Standards Institute has produced a toolkit to help officials pursue criminals.

The Institute of Fundraising identifies best practice for all those involved in charity goods collection within its recently revised House-to-House Code of Practice. For commercial participants and charities, demonstrating best practice is essential, not least to differentiate between legitimate and bogus collections.

Charities that commit to these high standards as members of the FRSB can use the tick logo on collection bags, fundraising literature and online, reassuring the public that they can make their donations with confidence.

During the event, delegates raised concerns that there was confusion not only among the general public but also within the industry about regulations relating to different types of house-to-house collections that raise money for charities. It was ascertained that



Hurd: said donors are increasingly concerned about bogus collections

AT A GLANCE

Public fears about fraudulent collectors are hitting charity bag donations. Legitimate commercial collectors can help charities to rebuild people's confidence in this method of giving

questionable activity should be reported as follows:

- Theft of charity collection bags should be reported to the local police.
- Suspected bogus collections can be reported to the NFIB's charity desk on 020 7601 6999 or by email to charity.desk@cityoflondon.police.uk.
- To report a business or charity that is not meeting best practice in charity clothing collections, contact the FRSB on 0845 402 5442 or email info@frsb.org.uk.

Theft and fraud have cost charities heavily both in terms of income and trust. Many charity supporters are now understandably nervous about any kind of household collection, whether it benefits charities or otherwise. If household collections are to be sustained, it is essential that commercial collectors and charities work side by side to demonstrate their commitment to high standards and communicate their position to UK householders. ■

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