

WALES'S ELDERLY CONTINUE TO FEAR WORST WHEN PHONE RINGS

Swansea, 15th September 2009 – The fear of crank calls and threats to their personal safety continues to be a major concern for Wales's elderly population, according to the UK's leading anti-nuisance calls service provider. The Call Prevention Registry has found that a significant proportion of 60+ year olds in Wales are continuing to receive as many as 240 unwanted sales and nuisance calls every year, despite regulation of the telemarketing industry since 1999.

Over 1.5 billion 'nuisance' calls and a further 1.5 billion 'malicious' calls are made to the British public every year, with 70% of phone owners saying that they have been victim of a phone scam during the last twelve months. While annoying for most of us the problem becomes exacerbated for the elderly who report a greater anxiety caused by these unwelcome calls.

Indeed, in 2008 the number of complaints made each month to the phone watchdog, Ofcom, almost tripled with the greatest concern to the elderly caused by a marked increase in the volume of so-called 'silent' calls – when the phone rings in the early hours of the morning or late at night and you pick up the receiver to hear nothing but silence. Understandably most people fear the worst, especially those who live alone and the elderly.

In the vast majority of cases silent and nuisance calls are not made by pranksters or potential burglars eyeing up your home. They are predominantly made by telemarketing organisations in call centres throughout the UK and overseas, some of whom use automated calling systems that can dial more telephone numbers than their available staff can deal with. And that's when you get silent calls.

But that doesn't stop the feelings of anxiety and dread experienced by the majority of people who receive these calls.

"Our customers describe feeling 'on edge' each time the phone rings or 'intimidated' by the increasingly aggressive sales tactics used by some callers before registering their telephone numbers with us," says Paul MacKenzie-Cummins of the Call Prevention Registry.

"Many more people believe that their homes are being primed for burglary which causes a significant degree of fear and anxiety, particularly among the elderly and those living alone, whilst 7 out of 10 people believe they have been called by a company promising them they have won a competition, for example, and all they have to do is pay a small deposit to 'guarantee' their prize," he added.

In 2008 Ofcom fined Barclaycard £50,000 (the maximum possible) for breaching telemarketing rules. During a seven month investigation the phone regulator found Barclaycard guilty of making an excessively high volume of silent calls with consumers having no way of knowing who had called them.

However, the phone watchdog has been widely criticised in recent years over its relaxed stance on the issue of unwanted telemarketing calls made to UK consumers. As has its support for the Telephone Preference Service (TPS) – an organisation operated by the Direct Marketing Association – which sells its data to the very telemarketing companies guilty of making these unacceptably high levels of nuisance calls.

Indeed, the average customer who has registered their details with TPS will only see a drop of 54% in nuisance calls over the course of a year, compared to the 95% fall in calls received by those who are registered with the Call Prevention Registry.

Even if people know there is nothing to fear, the fact remains that nuisance and silent calls are annoying, irritating and inconvenient at best. They can also be illegal, especially if your telephone number has been registered with the Call Prevention Registry.

“There are a number of practical steps that phone owners can take to put a stop to all nuisance calls,” says Mr MacKenzie-Cummins.

“The first thing to do is to keep calm and resist the temptation to give the caller a piece of your mind - they will love to hear they have rattled you. And make sure you don't give permission to your insurance company or any other organisation you have financial dealings with to pass on your details to any third party organisation – most of them will distribute your details to a number of other companies they have links with.

“If you are still receiving a lot of nuisance and telemarketing calls and don't want to involve the Police, you should consider registering with the Call Prevention Registry (CPR). CPR is an organisation that keeps a list of people who do not wish to receive any telemarketing calls and has the highest success rate in blocking nuisance calls than any other service provider and is the only organisation that can block unwanted calls from sales companies in the UK *and overseas.*”

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Media contacts:

Paul MacKenzie-Cummins is available for interview. A high resolution photograph of Paul MacKenzie-Cummins is attached. For all media enquiries, please contact Paul MacKenzie-Cummins, Head of Public Relations on:

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About Call Prevention Registry:

The Call Prevention Registry was established in 2005 and has since become the UK's market leading service provider in stopping nuisance calls. Call Prevention Registry is totally independent from any marketing or telephone sales agencies and are entirely funded by our members. This ensures our impartiality and guarantees our obligation to uphold our customer's requests for protection from unwanted nuisance calls.

The Call Prevention Registry is the only organisation with the capacity to block unwanted calls from telemarketing companies based in the UK and overseas.

The Call Prevention Registry supplies more than 1,500 data houses around the world with our do-not-call lists free of charge, whilst the Telephone Preference Service will charge each company for their lists.