



Master Locksmiths Association crack down on rogue locksmith

One of the UK's most notorious rogue traders Mark Makowski faces time behind bars as Westminster City Council and Westminster Trading Standards win a landmark case against the rogue locksmith.

Makowski who has previously been investigated by BBC's Rogue Traders, was found guilty to 13 accounts of fraud at the Old Bailey yesterday (22 July 2010). The jury ruled he was responsible for installing inferior products, charging a premium rate to unsuspecting customers and operating under a number of company names in the biggest case brought against a 'locksmith'.

Trading Standards presented three years worth of evidence throughout the five week trial to bring the case to court. Makowski who had been operating under 25 different company names over the period of investigation, has been refused bail and remanded in custody. Due to be sentenced on 31 August, Judge Anthony Morris told the court that a prison sentence was inevitable.

With one of its members acting as an expert witness for Westminster City Council and Trading Standards in this case, the Master Locksmiths Association is using the case as a warning to consumers of the potential dangers of hiring unregulated locksmiths.

Dr Steffan George from the Master Locksmiths Association said: "We are delighted that the jury found Makowski guilty of all accounts of fraud and are pleased that the hard work Trading Standards, Westminster Council and our members have put into this case has been rewarded. Rogue traders, although rare give our industry a bad reputation. Thankfully there are only a handful of them out there and this case a perfect example of how we won't let them get away with ripping off the public."

Makowski was found guilty of defrauding 13 customers including two incidents involving trading standards officers. Makowski appeared to help stranded customers but instead was

found guilty of causing unnecessary damage by drilling out locks and fitting cheap replacements locks instead of using expert methods applied by real locksmiths.

One victim from London was quoted £128 to open her door after becoming locked out but ended up receiving a bill for £462 for just 45 minutes work in April 2007. Another was charged £1,160 for replacing two locks which had to be replaced a few days later at a cost of only £154.

Dr George added: "The public have a right to feel protected when using a locksmith. Occasionally people like Mark Makowski abuse that trust. This is one of the reasons the MLA was set up – in order to be able to police standards in our industry. All MLA Approved Companies have to undergo strict vetting procedures including CRB checks, regular inspections and employ a qualified locksmith, and I would urge anyone employing a locksmith to ensure their locksmith is fully MLA licensed."

Sue Jones, Head of Trading Standards said: "We are delighted that justice has finally caught up with this trader, who charged his customers large sums of money for a very poor quality and often totally unnecessary work. We hope the fact that his activity was proved to be fraudulent sends out a clear message to other traders who may be tempted to behave in this way.

"This has been a lengthy case and involved a lot of hard work both by Westminster Trading Standards and our colleagues in the Trading Standards Regional Fraud Unit who have been of great assistance".

Cabinet member for Business, Enterprise and Skills, Cllr Brian Connell said: "His despicable behaviour dates back over a number of years, and he didn't care who his victims were or their financial situation, young, old, rich or poor, they were all considered fair game to satisfy his greed. It's a credit to the work of our trading standards team and other agencies who doggedly pursued this crook to bring him to justice.

"We welcome this verdict which will hopefully serve as a lesson to others who are tempted to exploit in this way; we will always act to protect the public from crooks like this."

John Peerless, Trading Standards Regional Fraud Unit Manager said: "It was the need to tackle just this sort of complex criminality with offences in many local authority areas that led to Business Innovation Skills (BIS) funding the Regional Scambuster projects. We were

pleased to offer extensive support to assist Westminster Trading Standards with this long running, wide spread investigation. This man has been trading in this way for many years to the detriment of many hundreds of consumers made vulnerable when locked out of their properties. Westminster are to be congratulated for taking this matter on after he started using an accommodation address in their area.”

ENDS

Notes to Editor

Issued on behalf of the Master Locksmiths Association by Karol Marketing Group. For further information, pictures or to set up interviews please contact Hayley Ford on 0191 265 7765 or email hayley@karolmarketing.com

About the MLA

The Master Locksmiths Association (MLA) was established over 50 years ago to set and promote standards of conduct, practice and materials within locksmithing. The MLA is recognised as the authoritative body for locksmithing by the police, home office and other leading organisations such as the British Standards Institute.

As a not for profit association, the MLA ensure its member companies undergo strict vetting procedures so the public, government and industry receive the appropriate service and advice. MLA members share the ethos that ‘skill and integrity’ remain paramount in locksmithing and are able to provide sound advice based on knowledge and experience.

A list of approved MLA companies are listed on the MLA website, for further information please visit: www.locksmiths.co.uk