

Container Fraud and Container Sales Scams

CSTA Accredited Member Guidance Note

Introduction

Frauds and scams continue to plague the container sales market - with cases being reported regularly of individuals, charities, sports clubs and businesses (both large and small), being contacted by criminals who offer containers for sale, take the money “in advance”, fail to deliver the order - and then disappear.

One of the aims of the CSTA is to promote the industry’s professionalism - and one of the ways to do that is to provide a list of Accredited Members - who are genuine companies, undertaking business in the correct way.

It is a continuous challenge to ensure that buyers of containers are aware of the number of scammers that are operating – and know about the “sophisticated” methods that they are using.

CSTA Accredited Members are authorised to display the CSTA logo. However, recognising that this could be scammed too, buyers should check the CSTA Membership Directory provided on the CSTA website

CSTA provides information and a communication channel for its Members to speak to each other. But, usually these container scams are undertaken directly by the criminals in contact with the customer – who assumes that they are dealing with a bona fide business, without checking their accreditation

“Shipping Container Scams” website

“Shipping Container Scams” (<https://shippingcontainerscams.com/>) is a useful website, which has been set up to provide valuable guidance for buyers of containers, alerting them to companies and websites claiming to sell shipping containers – companies who will take money with no intention of supplying any containers.

CSTA is not involved in the Shipping Container Scams (SCS) or its website, but we understand that the website is maintained with up-to-date information.

There are three main sections to the SCS website:

- A list of companies and websites known to be fraudulently offering containers for sale
- General advice about how to identify scams and fraudulent websites
- How to report a scam

1. List of fraudulent companies/websites

The SCS website provides a list of the names of over 25 websites which it has identified (or been reported) as being fraudulent.

It includes a description about each company – the way that it operates, the type of fraud that it is committing.

In many cases, the SCS website notes that the police are unable to do much about this. After 4-6 weeks and lots of reports they will usually attempt to close down a website, but a new one will then pop up a few weeks later.

2. Advice on how to identify scams

The CSTA supports the advice provided by the SCS about how to identify scams.

- **Check the company details from their invoice**
In particular, the website recommends checking the company registration number and the VAT registration number of any business that is offering containers for sale – many scam websites steal this information.
- **Search for the company on Google**
Some of the scam websites use Google Ads to appear on the first page.
- **Check their Accreditations and Memberships**
Some scam websites are copying Trade Association logos and other memberships and accreditations, to appear legitimate. ***Check with the Trade Association first!***
- **Check how long the website has been active**
Many of the scam websites are set up and only in operation for a few months, before being taken down. While legitimate companies are being set up, it is possible to check when a website was first registered using: <https://www.whois.com/whois/>.
- **Check their Social media history**
Social media can indicate how long the company has been active, what sort of reviews it has been getting, the length of time that the reviews have been coming in (a lot of 5-star reviews in a few days is very suspicious).
- **Don't automatically trust a good-looking website.**
Many scam websites look very professional, with office addresses (which are fake) and other details which have been stolen or invented
- **Call any other container trader**
Get multiple quotes and check with others – especially if you are offered a price which is considerably better than the others. Also, check if they have heard of the company who is offering the special deal.
- **Is the price “too good to be true”?**
If something “sounds too good to be true, it usually is too good to be true”. If you are offered a price which is 10% (or more) less than the others in the market, plus free delivery, then additional checks are necessary. However, sometimes genuine traders are able to offer special prices, so this should be used as a guide, rather than absolutely proof.
- **Does it “feel” right?**
While difficult to explain, people who have been scammed often have suspicions much earlier in the process. The website strongly recommends that no payment is made until the buyer is absolutely sure that it is dealing with a legitimate company.

The CSTA strongly encourages buyers to check the CSTA Membership Directory provided on the CSTA website.

3. Reporting a scam

Scams should be reported to the relevant Authorities. In the UK, this means the Police or the ActionFraud Cyber Crime Reporting Centre (0300 123 2040) or visit the ActionFraud website <https://www.actionfraud.police.uk>.

Fraud should also be reported to the SCS website, including any (or all) information, copies of emails and communications, invoices and details of what happened.

SCS will only publish a website as a scam when there is suitable proof of a scam.