

NEWS RELEASE

13th July 2009



MASTER LOCKSMITHS USE RULING TO ISSUE WARNING

The Master Locksmiths Association (MLA) is warning members of the public and businesses to be on their guard when using the services of unlicensed locksmiths.

The MLA says that unlicensed locksmiths operate in an entirely unregulated manner and may include those with criminal records ranging from petty crime, through to burglary, aggravated assault and murder. The MLA is aware of at least one case where a convicted murderer approached it to become a licensed locksmith.

The warning comes following the Governments ruling which comes into force this week (w/c 13th July 2009) that the Master Locksmiths Association is now entitled to carry out standard Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks into the backgrounds of its members and would be locksmiths applying for MLA training or licences.

The ruling issued by the Ministry of Justice comes after a period of intense lobbying carried out by the Master Locksmiths Association who were concerned over the wide gaps in security that existed because it was previously unable to carry out CRB checks.

Dr Steffan George, Development Director at the MLA said, "Prior to this ruling it was illegal to perform standard CRB checks on locksmiths. There were no effective controls and unlicensed, potentially criminal locksmiths could find themselves changing the locks on airports, businesses, schools and peoples homes without any safety net."

"This potential security threat still exists and we are urging businesses and members of the public to make sure they only use Master Locksmiths Association Licensed locksmiths for all their locksmithing needs."

“People often don’t realise that a locksmith is trained to overcome all forms of physical security and that if he or she installs your locks or cuts your keys in the first place then they will have the knowledge to gain access to your property, and the ability to make copies of keys. They effectively have your front door keys and could literally walk into your home or business anytime they choose, without your knowledge of them ever having been there.”

The MLA is also urging any organisation responsible for young or vulnerable people to review its security.

Said Dr George, “If you’ve had your locks fitted by a locksmith before this ruling, it makes sense to check that the locksmith you used is still currently a MLA Licensed locksmith. If not, we would encourage you to satisfy yourself as to the integrity of your security or to change your locks using a MLA licensed locksmith.”

The MLA currently carries out regular inspections on its licensed members. These inspections include checks on the quality and performance of work done, the presence of audit trails, advice given as well as spot checks on actual installations. The CRB checks will add a vital layer of additional security to the consumer using an MLA Licensed Locksmith.

The MLA’s request that it be added to the exceptions order for the Rehabilitation of Offenders act, thereby allowing it to carry out standard CRB checks was supported by Maria Eagle, the Minister of State, Government Equalities Office, who said at a recent sitting in the House of Commons (30th June 2009), “Before giving somebody access to house keys or, even more crucially, the keys to a hospital or an old peoples home, it is not unreasonable to expect that person to have been checked and assessed as being trustworthy and honest.”

The campaign was also supported by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) as well as various MPs.

Anyone wishing to contact the MLA or to find details of their nearest MLA Licensed locksmith can do so by visiting www.locksmiths.co.uk

Ends

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Notes to Editors

1. The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 introduced limitations on the requirement by members of the public to disclose previous convictions when applying for positions of employment. The thought behind this was to enable ex-offenders to find work without their previous criminal history prejudicing their chances of employment.
2. Although generally it is desirable to encourage employment of ex-offenders by allowing their convictions to become 'spent', there are certain positions of such sensitivity that disclosure of all convictions should be made available when requested.
3. Where members of society are at risk or vulnerable, such as might be the case with children and the elderly, the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 has a number of exceptions to the order which removes the right of ex-offenders to 'not disclose' details of past convictions. The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) is the organisation that manages the records associated with ex offenders.
4. Prior to the ruling made on the 6th July 2009 and signed on the 10th July 2009 the Master Locksmiths Association was not legally able to carry out CRB checks. This meant that the Association had no way of vetting its membership or those who wished to make use of its training.
5. Since locksmiths have access to all sorts of establishments, from schools to airports, the MLA has rightly been concerned at the lack of control and security within the industry. The MLA sees the Governments decision to allow them to carry out CRB checks as recognition of the problem and a valuable first step in tightening up procedures within a largely unregulated industry.

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. With circa 1400 members in the UK and some in the rest of the world, 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