



Dear Colleagues

Members are reminded about the paramount importance of ensuring their personal safety as the number of instances of abusive behaviour towards Openreach engineers continues to escalate.

To date, 35 field engineering members have reported experiencing varying degrees of verbal attacks by members of the public based on a groundless conspiracy theory that the 5G rollout is somehow connected with the spread of coronavirus.

In the latest recorded incident, which occurred on Tuesday, an Openreach engineer working in the Glastonbury area was approached by an irate woman as he worked on a cabinet rectifying a customer's broadband fault.

Becoming increasingly aggressive and threatening, the woman began yelling "you're installing 5G" – and, despite the engineer insisting that he wasn't, he found himself on the receiving end of an unnerving torrent of verbal abuse.

With tensions escalating in lockdown Britain however, it's not just the mobile mast 'fake news' that is putting members in increasing uncomfortable situations. In Liverpool, on the very same day as the abusive incident in Glastonbury, another Openreach engineer experienced threatening behaviour – including the blocking of his retreat – by a customer who was furious when the engineer told him he was not allowed to enter his property. Several days earlier, in north London, an engineer was stopped at traffic lights when a woman jumped in front of his van, threw a bottle of water at him, which hit and soaked him, while screaming abuse about 5G.

The CWU has long been concerned about an escalation in the number of abusive calls fielded by the union's extensive contact centre membership – and while no instances specifically related to Covid 19/ 5G have yet been escalated to union headquarters, the advice to such members is essentially the same: ***Your union is here for you; please inform your local rep about any abusive behaviour you experience – and we'll support you in any way we can.***

Yesterday (Wednesday) CWU deputy general secretary Andy Kerr was interviewed by *BBC Radio One* over the extraordinary escalation of abusive situations suffered by Openreach engineers since the start of the month.

The lunacy – which has included the vandalism of mobile phone masts, thereby disrupting not just 5G but also 3 and 4G communication flows at a time of national crisis - began after the live streaming and widespread sharing of a video by conspiracy theorist David Icke in which he linked 5G technology to the pandemic. (See CWU web news story [here](#))

Despite the swift efforts of Ofcom and politicians to attempt to quash a plainly ridiculous piece of 'fake news' - and an unusually fast response by the major social media platforms to

delete the offending videos and any other material perpetuating the falsehood – by Tuesday this week verbal attacks on Openreach engineers had been reported as far afield as Liverpool, Birmingham, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Weston-Super-Mare, London, Manchester, Bradford, Preston, Leicester and Harwich.

Today we remind members that the Health and Safety Executive's definition of work-related violence covers "*any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work.*"

Openreach's guidance to the field engineering members who have so far borne the brunt of the groundless conspiracy theory's backlash is unequivocal. Should you receive abuse from a member of the general public and feel unsafe while carrying out your role in the field:

- Call the police on 999 if you feel you are in immediate danger
- Make your site safe and get yourself to safety
- Report the incident to the BT Security helpdesk (number on the back of your passcard) 0800 321999
- Inform your manager
- Register the incident on CARM

But, whether you're an Openreach engineer, or you work in any other part of BT Group – be that in Technology or Enterprise or in the contact centre environment anywhere in the company - if you experience abusive behaviour, whether or not it is associated with Covid 19, the CWU needs to know so it can provide the support you need.

The union's message to you is simple:

- **First and foremost, if confronted by an abusive individual – either face-to-face or down the phone – prioritise your physical or mental well-being and remove yourself from the situation as best you can.**
- **Make sure the incident is formally recorded and that your manager is aware.**
- **ALWAYS inform your local rep or CWU Branch Office what has happened – because it is only by being aware of the abusive situations that members experience that the CWU can, both locally and nationally, ensure that steps are taken to address the issue and provide any support that is needed.**

Contact the CWU

The Union remains here to keep you safe and assist you through this difficult time. If you have concerns or need assistance please contact your local rep or Branch. If you don't know which Branch you are in you can find out via www.cwu.org/contact-us.

Alternately you can email covid19-tfs@cwu.org - however, please be aware that there will probably be a delay in responding as our resources are also depleted. (Please provide your full name, the BT line of business you work for and your workplace details)

We are here to help. Keep Safe

Yours sincerely

Dave Jukes

Assistant Secretary