

Certain homosexual offences can be removed from criminal records

Date published: 28 June 2018

If you have a conviction or caution for a homosexual offence, which is no longer criminal, you can apply to have it removed from police and court records.

Offences which are no longer criminal

The decriminalised offences are:

- buggery
- gross indecency
- procuring others to commit homosexual acts

The activity must have been:

- consensual
- with a person aged 17 or older

It must also not be an offence today. Sexual activity in a public toilet is not included as it is still illegal.

If you received a conviction or caution for any of the decriminalised offences, you can apply to have your record wiped clean or 'disregarded'.

Receiving a disregard

A disregarded offence means it will be treated as never having happened and won't appear in criminal record checks. You also don't need to disclose it on application forms or in court cases. A successful application also leads to an automatic legal pardon.

Posthumous pardons

Anyone who has since died but was convicted of a decriminalised consensual homosexual offence with someone over 17, will be automatically pardoned.

How to apply

It is free to apply for a disregard. Go to the link below for more information on pardons and disregards and to complete the application form:

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[Check if you're eligible for Rate Rebate](#)

Date published: 19 June 2018

Tenants and homeowners should check if they're eligible for the new Rate Rebate Scheme. Ratepayers getting Universal Credit can get a rebate on their rates. This is being rolled out along with Universal Credit across Northern Ireland.

Rate Rebate

To apply for Rate Rebate, you must:

If you're a tenant or homeowner, you can only make a claim for Rate Rebate once you've been awarded Universal Credit.

Any claim should be made as soon as possible following your first Universal Credit payment.

More information is available on this page:

How to apply

You have to register for an online account using your own email address. Once you have an account, you can apply online at this link:

You can also call Land & Property Services on 0300 200 7802.

If Universal Credit has not been yet rolled out in a particular area or someone is not eligible for Universal Credit, such as pensioners, rates support will continue through [Housing Benefit](#).

More useful links

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[Be aware of Giant hogweed and avoid contact](#)

Date published: 18 June 2018

Be aware of Giant hogweed and avoid contact with it, as it can cause blistering and swelling on the skin. The plant is usually found growing in areas of damp soils, such as river banks.

Giant hogweed

[Giant hogweed](#) grows up to between three and five metres high, which is what helps identify it as it looks similar to hogweed and cow parsley.

You should [report any sightings](#) of the plant.

Giant hogweed contains a sap which irritates skin when it is exposed to sunlight.

Symptoms are usually noticeable within 24 hours and include blistering and swelling on the skin, which may be made worse by over-exposure to the sun.

What to do

If you come into contact with Giant hogweed:

- cover the affected skin immediately to avoid exposure to the sun
- wash the skin with cold water

If there is blistering or the contact was with the eyes, you should [seek medical advice](#).

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[Keep children safe from burns and scalds](#)

Date published: 08 June 2018

It's important that parents, relatives and carers are aware of the hazards which can lead to burns and scalds, and take steps to make sure children are kept safe.

Reduce the risk of accidents

Accidents can happen quickly in or around the home, sometimes it takes just seconds, and occasionally these can lead to [burns and scalds](#).

But these accidents can easily be prevented by being aware of the dangers and hazards that are in the home, and taking steps to reduce the risks and make the home as safe as possible.

Hot appliances, liquids, and bath water are responsible for more than half of all burns and scalds, with young children being particularly vulnerable.

Be aware that:

- hot drinks can still scald 15 minutes after they've been made and can result in years of skin graft treatment – make sure hot drinks are out of reach of babies and children
- hot water scalds in seconds – run the cold water first and always check the temperature of bath water
- hair straighteners can get very hot very quickly and cause serious burns that scar for life – keep out of the reach of children and put them away safely after use

You can get more advice, including a video showing the dangers in the home, at this link:

Prevention is always better than a cure.

More useful links

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[Blind cord safety information and advice](#)

Date published: 06 June 2018

Looped blind cords and chains can pose a risk of injury or worse to babies and small children. It's important that adults check their homes and take steps to make their blind cords safe.

Keep out of reach

Window blind cords and chains must be kept out of reach of babies and small children.

Simple steps – such as securing cords and chains with safety devices and keeping furniture away from windows so that children cannot climb on them – can help prevent deaths.

Toddlers aged between 16 and 36 months are most vulnerable. It can take as little as seconds for a toddler to lose their life from becoming entangled in a window blind cord or chain.

You should:

- look around your home from a child's point of view to help spot potential dangers
- examine every blind in your home – if they have a looped control chain

or cord and do not have a safety device fitted, then you can easily install one of the many devices available

- make sure that all blind cords and chains cannot be reached by children
- move cots, beds, playpens, highchairs and any furniture away from windows and blinds – remember children love to climb
- when buying a new blind, always look for one that does not contain cords, has concealed cords or has an in-built safety device and that complies with the new European Standards

You can get more information and advice, including a helpful video, on the [blind cord safety](#) page.

For further advice on how to make your home blind cord safe, contact the home safety officer at your [local council](#) or your health visitor.

More useful links

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