



From mountain to sea

Trading Standards Bulletin

Bulletin No. 29

Doorstep Crime/ Cold Calling

We have recently received a report from our colleagues at Police Scotland about rogue traders who are currently operating in the Banchory area as gardeners which causes us some concern. It appears that the people concerned are going door to door looking for work and even when they don't get work at one address, they are using personal information gained in conversation at that address to persuade the occupants at nearby addresses to have work done. They also appear to be telling one member of a household that another has already arranged for this work to be done. Additionally, it appears that these 'traders' are charging people huge amounts for extremely shoddy work. So far, feedback suggests that some the work done is beyond remedying. It may be coincidence but at least one address has also noted that property has gone missing since their visit.

Our advice is clear and consistent when it comes to cold callers – Just Say No. Remain polite but firm. Thank them for their concern, advise them that you will take their observations into account and give the matter due consideration. Once you have done this you will contact the trader who you want to undertake the work (having researched reliable sources of information for such a trader, checked that they are members of trade bodies, if possible, spoken to friends or family for recommendations, perhaps even viewed previous work and spoken to those customers if it's a big job (all as per advice in recent bulletins).

Please avoid being drawn into conversation as this will be the rogue trader trying to soften you up to change your mind; **please, please, please** do not go anywhere near the subject of money or cost, as no matter what you say these rogue traders will promise you that they can do the work more cheaply than anyone else (though if you do engage them, the cost will undoubtedly skyrocket once you've been hooked like a salmon on the Dee). If necessary, tell them a white lie that you have a family member who does that sort of work and you'd rather have them do it (emphasise family loyalty, blood is thicker than water etc.), to give them the work as things have been quiet for them recently. Do what you must but stick to your guns. If they won't leave, tell them you will call the Police. Then they will move.

From mountain to sea

If you believe you can shed any light on these traders, please contact Police Scotland on 101. If you'd like to check back the previous Trading Standards bulletins for guidance, they can be accessed at:

<http://publications.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/dataset/trading-standards-crime-and-scams-bulletin>

Scams

One resident in the Garioch area recently received a phone call, apparently from NHS Scotland, asking her if she had had both Covid vaccines, how she had been after getting them, if she had received a paper Covid vaccine passport and, finally, if she had life insurance. When the resident said she didn't have insurance, the caller hung up. When the resident tried to call the number back, which had an area code in Wales, she was advised that the number was unobtainable. Clearly the call did not come from NHS Scotland.

This may have been an attempt to obtain the resident's personal details (which she did not give) or had the intention of trying to sell some goods or service to the resident, such as a Covid passport – for a fee. It may also have been an attempt by a less reputable legal firm trying to 'ambulance chase' people who have had adverse reactions to the Covid vaccines.

As with any cold calls at the door, on the phone or via social media, our advice is never give any personal details, especially financial information. If NHS Scotland do call you, they should have a record of your medical history (albeit it might be a summarised version), the call will likely be from an 0800 or 0300 number and staff will never ask about life insurance, ask you to go to a non-NHS website or to buy anything.

If you receive a call and any of the above factors apply, don't give any personal details, simply hang up and, if you can, block the caller.

Misc.

Bouncy Castles

Over the course of the summer, Trading Standards have received a number of enquiries and complaints about bouncy castles (inflatables as they're officially called) for parties etc. Bouncy castles are great fun when used safely.

Some of the complaints received have been about traders providing bouncy castles, which are little more than toys, for commercial purposes with traders charging considerable sums.

From mountain to sea

There also appears to be a great deal of uncertainty on the parts of traders and hirers when it comes to inflatables; traders on what their responsibilities are and hirers on what to look for when considering hiring a bouncy castle. There are two organisations in the UK which can help with these. They are

- the Pertexa Inflatable Play Accreditation (PIPA) which is an inspection scheme set up by the inflatable play industry to ensure that inflatable play equipment conforms to recognised safety standards and
- the Register of Play Inspectors International (RPII) which is an international body for testing inflatables and training operators.

From the perspective of the potential hirer there are certain things to look out for in a bouncy castle being hired for commercial purposes. PIPA and RPII have created the #bouncesafe campaign to help everyone have a great time and use bouncy castles safely. There are some key questions which hirers should ask before they hire a bouncy castle. These are:

- Has the bouncy castle been tested and does it have a PIPA tag? (Bouncy castles which are little more than toys will not have a tag of any sort.)
- Does the operator have Public Liability insurance?
- Has the operator been trained by the RPII?
- (An additional question might be 'does the event require a Public Entertainment Licence?')

Details of the #bouncesafe campaign can be found at <https://bouncesafe.org.uk/>

Details about Public Entertainment Licences can be found at <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/licensing/licences-and-permits/public-entertainment/>

Details about PIPA can be found at <https://www.pipa.org.uk/> and

Details about the RPII can be found at <https://www.playinspectors.com/>

Fire Safety

As you may already be aware, new regulations governing the numbers and types of smoke detectors and carbon monoxide monitors homes should have are due to come into force in February 2022, having been delayed from February 2021. This will undoubtedly create uncertainties. Scammers love uncertainty and will no doubt seek to exploit peoples' fears and uncertainties about the new regulations.

In an effort to combat this exploitation, Trading Standards Scotland have created an easy to follow slide (below) which aims to forewarn people about the sorts of scams which might arise and to signpost people to reliable sources of information.

From mountain to sea

Further information from Trading Standards Scotland can be found at <https://mailchi.mp/f60a4f562f8a/scam-share>

Further details about the changes can also be found from the Fire Service at <https://www.firescotland.gov.uk/your-safety/for-householders/fire-and-smoke-alarms-in-scottish-homes.aspx#> and the Scottish Government at <https://www.mygov.scot/home-fire-safety>

New Fire and Smoke Alarm Standard: Avoid Scams

Every home in Scotland must meet the Scottish Government's new standard for interlinked fire and smoke alarms by February 2022.

Scammers and rogue traders may try to take advantage of those who are unsure about how to comply with the new legislation or worried about meeting the installation deadline.

What Might Scammers Say?



Cold callers may tell you that you are eligible for financial support to install new fire alarms or that they are offering special deals.

If you get a cold call about the new fire alarms legislation, do not provide any details or agree to purchase any products.



You may get a leaflet through the door from a company selling fire alarms that implies that they have been endorsed by the Government.

Neither the Scottish Government nor Scottish Ministers have endorsed any particular suppliers, products or services.

Where Can I Find Trusted Information?

The best way to avoid scams is to use trusted sources of information. Don't deal with cold callers and be wary of any company that says their products or services have been endorsed by the Scottish Government. 

Scottish Government

www.mygov.scot/home-fire-safety

Detailed information about the new legislation, what you need to do and what to look for when choosing an alarm

Care & Repair Scotland

careandrepairsotland.co.uk / 0141 221 9879

Information about financial support available to eligible older and disabled homeowners

Scottish Fire & Rescue Service

www.firescotland.gov.uk / 0800 0731 999

Information about choosing and installing alarms and how to book a free Home Fire Safety visit

Trusted Traders

www.approvedtrader.scot

Find installers who have been vetted and approved by local Trading Standards officers

Report all scams to Advice Direct Scotland on 0808 164 6000 or at www.consumeradvice.scot

Tobacco

From mountain to sea

In another area of our work, Trading Standards deals with the unlawful sale of tobacco and cigarettes. This can involve the sale of cigarettes to young people under the age of 18 from shops and elsewhere, buying cigarettes on behalf of under-age young people or the distribution and sale of illicit and counterfeit tobacco (illicit cigarettes have been manufactured abroad by tobacco companies for foreign markets and smuggled into Scotland; counterfeit cigarettes have been manufactured abroad by criminal gangs and smuggled into Scotland and have been found to contain arsenic, asbestos, rat poison and even human waste as well as being made with low grade tobacco).

If you have any information to share about the unlawful sale of tobacco, please use the Contact Info below to pass that information to Trading Standards. If you would prefer, you can report the information anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

Conclusion

Please note that the advice given in these bulletins has been deliberately kept simple, so that if you are faced with a scenario such as the ones discussed here where fear, panic and alarm are often tools used deliberately by scammers, you will know what to do at that time. Remember, after the initial panic is over, you may have rights which Trading Standards can help you with.

If you have been the victim of a Doorstep Crime or an attempted crime, whether Bogus Caller or Rogue Trader, please report the matter to Consumer Advice Scotland so that Trading Standards can build a detailed, ongoing picture of the activities of these scammers throughout the Shire. This would be a great help to us to tackle this sort of crime.

Contact Info

For urgent Trading Standards matters, contact Aberdeenshire Council's Trading Standards at 01467 537222. For non-urgent enquiries, please contact Consumer Advice Scotland at <https://www.consumeradvice.scot/> or on 0808 164 6000.

Contact Police Scotland on 999 if you need urgent Police assistance or 101 for non-urgent matters. For more information about scams please visit Friends Against Scams at <https://www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk/> or Take Five at <https://takefive-stopfraud.org.uk/>

Please direct any media queries to news@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or 01467 538222 during office hours.