

From mountain to sea

# Doorstep Callers and Scams

## Bulletin No. 80

The articles in these bulletins are based on real life complaints made to Aberdeenshire Council's Trading Standards department, unless otherwise stated, to make them as relevant as possible to readers. Names, exact addresses etc. have been withheld to avoid identifying complainants and to comply with GDPR so please feel free to share the contents with friends, family, neighbours or any community groups you are a part of. For details of scams reported in other parts of Scotland please click on the [Trading Standards Scotland Bulletin page](#).

**Doorstep Callers** - Nothing to report.

### **Scams etc.**

#### E-mail scam

One resident in the Buchan area recently received an e-mail offering him the opportunity to apply for a well-paid job which involved reviewing films at home. The resident replied to the e-mail and was provided with a link which led to a chat on WhatsApp with a woman called Helen about the job. Having been unemployed for some time he was keen to re-enter the labour market.

During the course of the conversations, the resident was asked to provide photos of his passport and bank account, to prove his identity and provide an account to pay his wages into, both of which he complied with. There was then a request to the resident to transfer a sum of money to Helen, supposedly for training fees. Now suspecting that it was a scam he was involved in, the resident stopped complying with the requests which Helen made then the tone of her messages changed from being friendly to being quite intimidating. The resident thereafter ended all contact and reported the matter to Trading Standards who are investigating the report.

In truth, this was a scam making misuse of the resident's desire to get a job.

Some points to consider:

- Be very wary of unsolicited e-mails offering job opportunities. Think; how did the sender find out about you (specifically) or is the e-mail a blanket e-mail being sent out to large numbers of people (effectively a spam/scam e-mail)?



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- In either case above the e-mail deserves to be sent to your junk or spam folder, or sent to the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) at [report@phishing.gov.uk](mailto:report@phishing.gov.uk)
- Never click on the hyperlink in unsolicited e-mails as it may lead to you spoofed websites looking to steal your data, where scammers will either misuse your information to commit frauds or the link may take you to a place where computer viruses or ransomware are automatically downloaded onto your computer,
- Never share your passport details with anyone unless you are absolutely certain of who they are. Your passport is a highly sensitive document which holds very valuable information (to criminals) about you. If you think you've been tricked into sharing this information, please contact the Passport Office on their [advice page](#),
- Likewise, never share your bank account details with anyone as a result of an unsolicited e-mail. Again, this is sensitive information, which is valuable to criminals should they wish to try to steal from your account or set up payments out of your account,
- If you think that you've been the victim of a scam like this, particularly if you've lost money, please do report the matter urgently to Police Scotland as a fraud and remember to report the matter to your bank too.

As always, please also remember to report matters like this to your local Trading Standards office, so that we can look into the matter too. Contact details are at the end of this Bulletin.

### Voice Text Scam

One resident of Deeside recently reported to Trading Standards that she had received a phone call, allegedly from BT, advising the resident that someone else wanted to use her telephone number from a date which was just a couple of weeks into the future and that her BT account would need updating. The implication was that the changeover would be taking place in any case and that there was nothing the resident could do to prevent it.

It was notable that the call was a pre-recorded message, given by a man with a well-spoken English accent who instructed the resident to call a telephone number which was also given in the message. Thankfully, the resident sensed it was a scam and did not call the number passed but called BT instead. BT were able to confirm that it was indeed a scam.

Some points to note:

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- BT was in no way a part of this scam but simply the means to try to give the scam some credibility,
- In truth, BT had no plans to make any changes to the resident's phone line or account; the content of the message was completely false,
- The purpose of the message was purely to alarm the resident, so that she would call the number in the message,
- The number in the message no doubt was a high tariff phone line belonging to the scammer. Had the resident called it, no doubt she would have been on hold for a protracted length of time, then cut off afterwards without ever being able to speak to anyone but would have received a whopping phone bill over the next few weeks for being kept on hold,
- If you receive such a call, simply hang up,
- If you can, use the 1471 service to note the scammers number, note the number in the body of the message then call BT to report these numbers to them.

As always we would also appreciate it if you could report the matter to your local Trading Standards officer for us to collate and if feasible, act upon.

### **Misc.**

As we head once more into the festive season, people's minds will be naturally turning to buying presents for their loved ones. This will no doubt include items like children's toys and electrical items such as charging cables all the way up to e-bikes or e-scooters.

Trading Standards wants to see everyone have a peaceful and enjoyable Christmas so, to that end, we have compiled this article to offer advice to avoid disappointment with these items, or worse.

### **Children's Toys**

When it comes to buying children's toys, safety is paramount. Last year, research was conducted by the British Toy & Hobby Association into online marketplaces which were selling toys from third party sellers. This research found that:

- 100% of the toys tested were illegal to sell in the UK,
- 90% of the toys tested were unsafe for a child to play with.

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The types of injuries which these types of toy could cause included choking, burns, electric shocks and injuries which required surgery to remove button batteries from a child's throat and another instance which required a high-powered magnet from a child's large intestine.

The BTHA advise that people should:

### **Research before you purchase:**

- Search for the company/brand that makes the toy or character you want to buy and then include the company name when you search the online marketplace.
- Make sure the toy you want has not been recalled and look to make sure there are no news stories about safety concerns. You can search the [UK Government Product Recall and Alert page here](#).
- Check reviews about the seller and make sure that you know how to contact them if there are any issues with the toy.

### **Be careful when buying from third-party sellers on online marketplaces**

Get as much information on the seller as you can, especially if you're buying from an online marketplace. Not everything sold on an online platform is supplied by them - don't assume that the marketplace has conducted any tests or checks on these products. If the actual supplier is not based in the UK, you may face heightened risks.

**Be wary of going for the cheapest option** - compare the toy's price with other sellers and similar products. If it's a fraction of the cost, the price could be lower due to a number of factors:

- It could be a counterfeit product, which will not have been made to the same standards as the original and will possibly be illegal for sale in the UK,
- The product may include cheaper materials and have a design that is less durable or unsafe,
- It may not have gone through the correct legal testing and assessments. This is very expensive and means genuinely safe products can cost more to manufacture.

### **Check the product carefully before giving it to a child:**

- Check it has an EU address,
- Check it has a CE mark,
- Check that toys are clearly marked with age restrictions, which are based on risks such as choking hazards. Always follow the age recommendations,

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- Check for choking hazards such as loose ribbons on toys and costumes,
- Ensure that any button batteries in a toy are safely behind a screwed down flap,
- Check that the packaging looks genuine, with no spelling errors and the warnings and labels in the correct language,
- Check that there is an address to contact in case anything is wrong with the toy.

**Supervise the child when they play with the toy for the first time** - many of the illegal toys found by the BTHA broke very quickly, releasing dangerous small parts or gel contents.

### Electrical Goods

Over the last year there have been reports in the media and to Trading Standards about people who have bought electrical items, usually online, which have turned out to be dangerous.

These media reports have included charging wires for mobile phones which have given users an electric shock to e-bikes whose batteries have exploded when left charging for too long. In many instances these items have been bought online from online marketplaces.

Trading Standards recommends buying from a retailer you trust such as directly from a manufacturer's website or a High Street store where the products sold will meet the required safety standards and if there is a problem you can return the goods for a replacement or a refund. However, if you're browsing an online marketplace it's not always easy to know if you're buying direct or from a well-known retailer.

Some points to consider when buying online:

- Don't go by the price alone. Check the price of similar items by other sellers. If there's a notable price difference, ask yourself why. Could it be that the item you're considering is sub-standard or even counterfeit?
- Be wary of the reviews. Fake reviews are a growing problem and it can be hard to tell them apart from the real ones. However, if there is an extremely high proportion of the reviews which are 5 star, or include pictures or videos, you may be dealing with a fake review. Try to look for reviews marked 'verified purchaser' where the website cross-references buyers with reviewers.
- If there are a lot of reviews which were posted at the same time, they may have been uploaded by people who have been incentivized by the seller

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- by receiving gifts from the seller. Look for reviews making references to gift cards or refunds or which use terms like 'bribe' and 'warning'.
- Genuine reviewers often go into some detail about their experience with the product. Look for trends in these reviews, perhaps focusing on the same things, like the product failing after short time or just not being up to the job.
  - Be wary of suppliers where you can't verify their location. If the supplier has a UK postal address (rather than a co.uk website (as web domains can be easily purchased) you will have consumer rights. If they are based abroad, you may not and many of these imported goods are made as cheaply and as quickly as possible and may not have been safety tested.
  - If there are prominent claims in the advert that the item is 'genuine', 'approved' or 'UKCA' or 'CE certified', be wary as reputable sellers don't usually need to point this out to potential customers. All electrical products will have the manufacturers name or trademark along with other marks such as UKCA or CE on their label if made by a legitimate manufacturer. This information is normally on the product itself.
  - Much more detailed advice can be found on the website of the campaigning charity [Electrical Safety First](#).

E-bikes are items which have grown in popularity over the last couple of years, making getting out and about again more achievable for people who might not otherwise have been able to do so. However, there have been a number of reports, thankfully a small number, of reports of the batteries on these e-bikes exploding, often in a very dramatic fashion.

Should you be considering buying an e-bike for yourself or a loved one, for a number of reasons including safety reasons, it's well worth doing a bit of research on these products. One good place to start is on the [Which? website page](#) but some basic points to remember are:

- Always follow the manufacturer's instructions when charging an e-bike.
- Only use manufacturers recommended charging units and batteries.
- Never leave an e-bike charging overnight or for lengthy periods without checking on it by feeling if the battery or charger is hot. If either is, switch it off immediately.

[London Fire Brigade has some very pertinent guidance on their website](#) to anyone considering purchasing or using an e-bike and we would strongly suggest that it is worth following.

All that remains is for us to wish you a Merry Christmas!



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### **Conclusion**

Please note that the advice given in these bulletins has been deliberately kept simple, so that if you are faced with such a scenario where fear, alarm and panic are tools often used deliberately by scammers, you will know what to do at that time.

If you have been the victim of a Bogus Caller or other form of scam, please report the matter to Consumer Advice Scotland so that Trading Standards can maintain a detailed picture about scammers operating in the Shire. This would be a great help to us to tackle this sort of crime.

If you have any information to share about the unlawful sale of tobacco or disposable vapes, 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.

### **Contact Info**

For non-urgent Trading Standards enquiries in Aberdeenshire, please contact the [Consumer Advice Scotland](#) website or call them on 0808 164 6000. For urgent Trading Standards matters, contact Aberdeenshire Council's Trading Standards on 01467 537222 or e-mail us at [trading.standards@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:trading.standards@aberdeenshire.gov.uk).

Aberdeen City Council's Trading Standards department can be contacted by calling 0300 0200 292 or e-mailing [tradingstandards@aberdeencity.gov.uk](mailto:tradingstandards@aberdeencity.gov.uk)

Contact Police Scotland on 999 if you need urgent Police assistance or 101 for non-urgent matters.

For more information about scams please visit the [Friends Against Scams website](#) or [Take Five](#) at their website.

Please direct any media queries to [news@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:news@aberdeenshire.gov.uk) or 01467 538222 during office hours.

All previous Trading Standards bulletins can be found on the Aberdeenshire Council website on the [Trading Standards Scams Bulletin page](#).