

Trading Standards Bulletin

Bulletin No. 31

Doorstep Crime/ Cold Calling

Sad to say that we are still receiving reports of rogue traders turning up at people's doors, lying to them and cheating them out of substantial sums of money. One of the latest reports we've received involves 'workmen' turning up at a house in the Lower Deeside area pretending to be sub-contractors with the Council and offering to re-tar the resident's private drive with spare tar from another job. Needless to say, these men were not linked to the Council (as Council workmen would not make such an offer, especially for a private drive). The spokesman deliberately overestimated the area to be re-tarred and was also quite persistent in badgering the resident into getting the work done that day. There was no written quote provided, only a verbal quotation, no 14-day cooling off period given and no invoice provided when the work was done. As mentioned in more detail in previous bulletins, all of these things are required by law. Payment was made by direct bank transfer to the scammers bank account 'due to Covid'.

The scammers even sent someone else round the same afternoon to 'inspect' the morning's work. However, the inspector also tried to persuade the resident to have more work done on his property. Thankfully, he declined but was still out of pocket by a four figure sum for the earlier work.

As we've mentioned in previous bulletins, it's far safer to politely decline any offers from doorstep traders, excusing yourself if necessary by saying that you have a relative in that line of work; that you have a someone in the house visiting you so you need to get back to them or something on the stove that might burn or boil over. Remember too, please don't discuss prices with cold callers. Trading Standards see far too frequently the outcomes of people making the mistake of getting work done by these rogues.

Scams

Scrap Metal Dealers

Trading Standards have also received reports of a man doing the rounds in the Formartine area claiming to be a metal dealer and offering to buy gold and silver jewellery and various scrap metals. This man has also shown undue interest in outbuildings at houses he's visited. He has also presented a card of some sort,

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on a lanyard, 'proving' that he was a legitimate trader. The man also claimed that he had the Trading Standards department's authority to trade.

Itinerant scrap metal dealers do indeed need to be licensed to act as such but authority is given by the Licensing Department of a Local Authority, not Trading Standards. Nor do Trading Standards give any form of permission or endorsement to traders. As with any other type of cold caller, our advice is politely but firmly decline their offers and if their suspicious behaviour concerns you, consider reporting the matter to Police Scotland on 101.

Sales Websites

One resident recently advertised some second hand beds for sale on an online sales website for £100. He received a fairly prompt response from a potential buyer who was keen to buy the beds unseen. The buyer even provided details of a bank account where the payment would be coming from.

The buyer was so keen that they arranged for the beds to be uplifted by a courier service, however the courier would have to be paid upfront at a cost of £300. The buyer suggested that if the resident paid the courier when they arrived to collect the beds, the buyer would pay the resident £400 by direct payment to cover everything.

Smelling a rat, the resident declined the suggestion and the sale, which in truth was a scam. The scam being that they resident should pay £300 to the courier then wait for reimbursement from the buyer which would never come. The tell-tale signs, apart from this, was that the buyer was willing to buy the beds unseen and that they were prepared to spend three times as much on courier services than the beds were valued at. The fact that the goods for sale were beds is really a secondary matter, as the scam could have been based on any goods which were for sale.

Misc.

In earlier bulletins we have covered puppy selling scams. Please find below a recent message from the Kennel Club about puppy sales which we've been asked to circulate:

KENNEL CLUB EXPOSES 'DANGEROUS' VIRTUAL PUPPY BUYING WORLD AND URGES REVERSAL OF PANDEMIC BAD HABITS

New research reveals alarming lockdown legacy as 'click and collect' and 'click and drop' puppies now seen as the norm

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- Half of dog owners who ‘click and collected’ a puppy during the pandemic would be happy to do so again, now restrictions have eased – reversing years of campaigning to change damaging puppy buying habits
- A quarter of Brits admit that post-lockdown, it’s still ‘normal’ and ‘easier’ to meet a puppy virtually rather than in person, before purchase
- Three in five owners who had their dog delivered to their door, and almost half who didn’t see their puppy with its mum, said they would buy a dog the same way in the future
- And more than a fifth of new owners admit avoiding crucial doggy ‘life admin’, such as registering with a vet or getting insurance, or not socialising their puppy with other dogs, people or day-to-day situations – mirroring other bad habits picked up during lockdown
- The Kennel Club urges Brits to #BePuppywise by reversing habits and this virtual dependency – providing resources and advice from how to buy a puppy responsibly post-lockdown, to training tips for pandemic pets

With two in five (43 per cent) Brits admitting to picking up bad habits generally during the pandemic, dog experts are warning that these are translating to puppy buying and creating a damaging long-term legacy.

New research released by The Kennel Club as part of its #BePuppywise campaign, shows that post-lockdown, a quarter of Brits admit that it’s ‘normal’ and ‘easier’ to meet a puppy virtually, rather than in person, enabling more scammers and rogue breeders to disguise horrific breeding conditions and dupe owners, resulting in a backwards step for dog welfare.

Worryingly, the research shows that these habits might be here to stay, as three in five owners (62 per cent) who had their dog delivered to their door, and 42 per cent who didn’t see their puppy with its mum, said they would buy a dog the same way in the future. Half of those who ‘clicked and collected’ a new pet, without meeting it prior, said they would also do so again – mirroring other bad habits developed more widely during the pandemic.

Whilst Covid-19 restrictions once forced virtual meetings and puppy deliveries – with 43 per cent of pandemic owners having their puppy delivered to their door or opting for ‘click and collect’ without seeing their puppy prior to purchase – more than one in ten owners (13 per cent) now agree that ‘click and collect’ or delivery is the norm when buying a puppy post-lockdown, reversing years of campaigning to change behaviour and opposing new laws to crack down on rogue puppy trading introduced last year.



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The research also highlights the consequences of such high demand for puppies during the pandemic and a new dangerous virtual puppy buying world, where scammers and rogue breeders can more easily hide behind a screen:

- 36 per cent of pandemic puppy owners struggled to find an available pet due to soaring demand, resulting in more people going further afield for a four-legged friend and fuelling a new virtual puppy buying reality
- Now, more than a fifth (22 per cent) don't think it's essential to collect a puppy and see it interacting with its mum, in its home environment, if they're located more than two hours away
- And almost a third (29 per cent) don't think it's essential to meet a puppy before paying for it, preferring to 'click and collect' or opting for delivery, and favouring virtual meets, even after lockdown

"It's understandable that many of us may have developed some fairly harmless bad habits during multiple lockdowns, such as ordering one too many takeaways, getting up late or having multiple deliveries to our doors," commented Mark Beazley, Chief Executive of The Kennel Club. "But when it comes to puppy buying, these bad habits must be reversed.

"Whilst the message about always seeing a puppy with its mum, in its home environment, seemed to have finally got through and was reinforced in new laws in 2020, this research shows the pandemic's alarming impact on the way people expect to buy a puppy, with many now seeing virtual puppy buying, 'click and collect' or pup deliveries as the norm – taking us backwards in terms of dog welfare and responsible puppy buying.

"Of course there is nothing wrong with seeing an advert for a puppy online, but we're urging potential owners to 'be puppywise' and always then see the puppy interacting with its mum, in its home environment in real life, as lockdown restrictions are no longer in place. If a breeder is offering to deliver the pup to your house or asking to take money from you before you've even seen the pup, alarm bells should be ringing. Scammers, rogue breeders and cruel puppy traders can, and will, cash in on this dangerous virtual puppy buying world, with devastating consequences for dogs."

Welfare organisations like The Kennel Club are also concerned about the impact of the thousands of owners who impulse-bought, relied on disreputable sources and didn't think long-term before getting a puppy, emulating bad habits picked up more generally during lockdown:

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- Almost one in five new owners (17 per cent) spent less than two hours researching their new puppy and where they would get it from, amidst soaring demand, rife scams and more widespread impulse buying during the pandemic
- A quarter (24 per cent) admit not finding a reputable source of advertised puppies, relying on internet chatter or social media
- 23 per cent didn't make a plan for a return to the workplace or 'normal life' before getting their puppy

And upon getting their new four-legged friend home, one in ten didn't establish a daily routine – such as walks and dinner time – with their puppy. Almost a fifth (19 per cent) put off completing post-purchase admin, including getting insurance, registering with a vet or booking vaccinations, and over half (54 per cent) didn't go to puppy training classes, with 20 per cent admitting they didn't socialise their puppy with other dogs, people or day-to-day situations outside the home.

And it isn't just human behaviors causing concern; a quarter of pandemic puppy owners admit their dog has picked up bad habits during the pandemic, such as jumping up and barking.

Following this worrying research, The Kennel Club is urging owners and potential puppy buyers to give their best friend the best start via its #BePuppywise campaign – providing advice, tools and resources, from videos to top tips for both potential owners to help them find the right dog and breeder, and prepare for their new family member, as well as those new owners who are struggling with their pandemic puppy.

More information about the campaign as well as advice, tips, checklists and downloadable resources for owners and potential owners on how to #BePuppywise are available at thekennelclub.org.uk/be-puppywise.

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



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activities of these scammers throughout 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, 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 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.

All previous Trading Standards bulletins can be found at: <http://publications.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/dataset/trading-standards-crime-and-scams-bulletin>