

From mountain to sea

Doorstep Callers and Scams

Bulletin No. 70

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.

Doorstep Callers

Trading Standards were recently contacted by a resident in the Formartine area about a simple but notable roofing scam. The resident's elderly neighbour had been contacted at home by a roofer who called at the address about work which the roofer believed was apparently required on the resident's roof. The work was agreed and apparently completed and the neighbour paid the roofer by cheque for a 4 figure sum.

The roofer returned to the neighbour's the next day and complained that the bank would not cash the cheque, so he would need a fresh cheque to cover his costs. Notably, the roofer did not return the first cheque but the neighbour duly obliged with a second cheque and the roofer left. However, he returned the next day to say the bank would not cash the second cheque either, so he would need a third cheque to cover the original costs. The roofer did not return the second cheque either. It was at this point that the resident, who was visiting his neighbour, intervened and called the conversation to a halt. He asked the roofer to leave or he would call the Police, so the roofer left.

The resident then helped his neighbour to contact his bank and report the matter. It appears that the roofer had presented the first cheque, which had cleared but the bank stopped the second cheque, which hadn't yet cleared. The obvious intent of the roofer was to extract as many cheques as possible from the vulnerable neighbour, thereby doubling or tripling his profits in the process.

Some points to consider:

- Our advice remains the same; as this incident demonstrates, dealing with doorstep callers is a highly risky business. Far safer to just thank them for their concern and say, "No thanks",



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- Take haggling out of the equation. Tell the caller that you have a relative who's in that line of work and in this cost of living crisis, you'd like them to look at the issue instead,
- DO NOT discuss prices, so you remove the opportunity for the caller to say that they 'will do it cheaper',
- If the caller becomes persistent, tell them you have a visitor and you really must go back indoors,
- Alternatively, tell them you have a pot boiling on the stove and you're worried it might boil over,
- If the caller becomes insistent, tell them you will call the Police (and mean it). If necessary, call the Police,
- DO NOT be afraid to close the door on the caller. They have had enough of your time, just remember to lock it too,
- Try to note as much detail as you can about the caller, their appearance and their vehicles and keep any paperwork they might hand over to you.

Report the matter to Police Scotland or Trading Standards, so that they can collate these reports and consider taking action against the caller.

Scams etc.

Text Scam

A number of weeks ago we reported on the 'Hi Mum' text scam where scammers were pretending to be the recipient's child texting mobile phones to ask for help after their phone broke. Like a nasty virus, this scam seems to have mutated a little as a resident of the Mearns reported that he had received a text with the message:

"My screens gone from dropping my phone Mum. Please ttxt me on my new num when you get this . (Insert scammer's mobile number here).

Although the scam has changed, our advice remains the same; most importantly, if you receive such a text treat it with extreme caution:

- If you think the sender might actually be your child, insist on speaking to them in person to confirm if it is or not,
- If in any doubt, don't be persuaded into transferring any money to the sender,
- If the sender provides you with bank details, try to compare them with your child's account details if you can, as a way of trying to confirm the sender's identity,

If you're satisfied that the sender is a scammer:



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- End all contact with the sender and ignore any further messages,
- If you can, block the sender's number on your phone,
- If you know how, forward the text to your telephone service provider on the spam text short code of 7726 for them to collate and block the sender's number,
- If you can, take a screen shot of the text, add it to an e-mail and send the e-mail to the National Cyber Security Centre at report@phishing.gov.uk for them to investigate.

Ultimately, as with so many other scams, the intent here will be to separate the recipient from their cash.

Misc.

Trading Standards have recently received a number of reports from consumers about an unusual type of scam.

These consumers have been in discussions with legitimate traders about getting work done. Parts of these discussions have been conducted by e-mail. It also appears that some of the traders have worked for these consumers in the past (hence the reason they've been asked back to do these current jobs).

During the e-mail discussions, e-mails have come from the 'trader' requesting part or full payment for the quoted sum, usually to the 'trader's' bookkeeper or accountant. On one occasion the consumer has been offered to have the work done for a forthcoming date which had been cancelled by another customer. On another they were advised that if they paid the quote in full that no VAT would be payable.

This is a bit of a new phenomenon but a worrying one as one consumer lost a 5 figure sum as a result of this scam and both consumers and traders caught out by this scam have found it very stressful. It also appears that the scammers intervene in the conversations around the time discussions about payment began.

Should you need the services of a trader and discussions by email involving payments leaves you suspicious about their authenticity/origin or you are concerned about falling victim to this type of scam, we suggest you phone, text or speak to the trader in person to confirm details of the costs and the account to which the payment should be made. It may also be worth making payment by cheque rather than by direct bank transfer so you know exactly where the payments are going to.



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If you think that you may have fallen victim to this sort of scam, please remember to report it immediately to your bank, then to Police Scotland and to Trading Standards so that enquiries can be made. Remember too to change your e-mail passwords on a regular basis to shut out scammers.

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

Aberdeen City Council's Trading Standards department can be contacted by calling 0300 0200 292 or e-mailing 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 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.



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All previous Trading Standards bulletins can be found at:

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