



From mountain to sea

Trading Standards Bulletin

Bulletin No. 39

Doorstep Crime/ Cold Calling

Trading Standards have recently received reports of cold callers attending at people's homes in Peterhead, claiming to be contractors working for Aberdeenshire Council and that they are there to measure up the kitchen for a new kitchen suite. After measuring up these cold callers have then asked householders for payments towards the new kitchen. In one instance, a householder has actually handed over cash, believing the cold caller was genuine.

The truth of the matter is that these cold callers do not work for Aberdeenshire Council; they are scammers.

Please note that when Aberdeenshire Council Housing staff or their contractors are due to attend at people's homes;

- Aberdeenshire Council Housing office will write to the householder in advance, advising when the staff member or contractor will be attending and who they are.
- Any staff member or contractor should have their official Council ID badges with them, on open display. Contractors' ID badges will bear the Council logo and their own company's logo.
- Aberdeenshire Council employees or contractors working on behalf of the Council will never ask for money for this type of work. The finance side of things is handled by the Council 'behind the scenes'.

If anyone comes to your door claiming to be from the Council or a contractor for the Council and they are not wearing an official ID badge, ask to see it. If they cannot produce it, DO NOT let them in, DO NOT give them any money but report them to Police Scotland on the non-emergency number of 101 or 999 if it is an emergency."

Scams

Remote Car Sales

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One resident in south Aberdeenshire recently saw a car for sale on a popular auction site. Noting that the price was just under £9000, well below what she expected for a car of that type, she made some enquiries with the seller, despite some misgivings, but also did some enquiries of her own. The seller advised that he was now living abroad and the car sale was being managed by a company on his behalf.

The resident then made some enquiries with the company managing the sale. She also noted that their website did not appear in her internet searches. The managing company gave the resident the company website address, which only then became traceable over the internet and advised that if she wished to buy the car she would have to pay the selling price to a different company, an escrow company, by direct bank transfer. The escrow company would then hold the funds until the car had been delivered. An invoice was sent to the resident to that effect.

By making some enquiries about both companies on the government website, Companies House (<https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/>) she was able to establish that the managing company was not registered at all with Companies House and the escrow company had only been registered for a matter of weeks. The resident's misgivings grew to the point where she abandoned any further enquiries but not before noting that the sales advert had disappeared from the auction website, the managing company had changed their business address according to their website (both old and new addresses were poorly covered by street mapping services), and that the website was later suspended.

This situation highlights the importance of doing your own homework when considering large purchases from unknown sellers. This resident was also contacted by a young couple who had paid the price for the car and had heard nothing since.

Please also bear in mind the APP Scams Voluntary Code as discussed in Bulletin 30 for payments made by direct bank transfer.

Misc.

In Bulletin 29 we highlighted the then forthcoming changes to fire safety at home with the introduction of new regulations covering smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors and heat sensors. These changes came into force on 1 February 2022.



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Trading Standards were recently advised by a partner agency about a householder who had been quoted £2000 to have detectors fitted within her home according to these regulations. This was considered to be far in excess of what it should have cost.

In an effort to try to avoid this, when arranging to have detectors etc. fitted, Trading Standards suggest that you should consider getting at least three quotes from reputable fire safety companies, according to your needs and your budget, then fine tune the results until you are satisfied that you have the right products you need to keep your home safe.

A good place to start the process of searching for reputable companies is with the National Security Inspectorate (<https://www.nsi.org.uk/>), which is the national certification body in the security and fire safety sector. The NSI have a searchable national database for accredited traders on their home page.

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.

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 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.



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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>