



From mountain to sea

Doorstep Callers and Scams

Bulletin No. 76

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

One resident in the Formartine area recently reported to Trading Standards about an unpleasant experience he had with a caller at his door.

A man driving a dark gray pick-up called at the resident's door and offered to tar his drive for free. Thinking this offer was too good to be true, the resident declined. The man leaned forward toward the resident and insisted once again that the work was free. This was done in quite an intimidating manner, clearly intended to coerce the resident into capitulating. Thankfully, the resident stood his ground and continued to decline the 'offer' despite the caller becoming quite aggressive and refusing to identify his company by name.

The caller was described as medium height and build, with short dark brown hair and an English accent, carrying flyers in his hand.

In truth, although the 'offer' was 'free', after work had started that may have changed and the caller, seeing that the resident had been easily coerced into getting the work done, may have thought he would be equally easily coerced into paying a large sum of money for the work. Alternatively, the caller may have demanded payment for the labour or wear and tear on tools or machinery. As we have highlighted before, if you accept this offer, apart from having to deal with the doorstep caller you may have to call in real traders later to repair the drive.

Some points to consider if you don't wish to deal with doorstep callers, particularly if you're concerned that they may turn aggressive:

- Consider fixing 'no cold caller' signs at the entrance to your garden gate/driveway if you don't already have one,

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- Consider fixing 'no cold caller' stickers at your main door, in a prominent position where they can be seen easily (these can be obtained from Trading Standards by using the contact details at the end of this bulletin),
- Consider installing a video doorbell, so you can converse with doorstep callers from a safe space or even when you're not at home. These doorbells can also record the conversation,
- Consider installing a 'fish-eye' door viewer in your main door so you can see who is at your door from behind the locked door, then you can choose whether to open the door or not (remember, you're not obliged to do so),
- Consider installing a door chain or door bar at your main door so that you can partially open the door to speak to callers, without them being able to put their foot in the doorway or push the door all the way open,
- Particularly as we're moving back into darker evenings, for poor light conditions, consider installing a movement activated floodlight which will light up the doorway before you open the door. The floodlight should be positioned in such a way as to prevent it from being easily damaged and so that it gives a good light spread of the doorway,
- If you use a Community Alarm, remember to take the pendant to the door when you go to answer it just in case you need to summon assistance,
- If you have a mobile phone, take it to the door with you and use it to call the Police if the caller becomes aggressive. Learn first how to use your phone in an emergency to call 999, so that you can do so quickly should you need to.

Remember too to report any such incident of aggressive doorstep callers to your local Trading Standards office and/or Police Scotland, using the contact details at the end of this bulletin.

Scams etc.

Car Sales scam

Trading Standards have received a number of complaints over recent weeks about certain 'companies' which are advertising second hand vehicles, mainly cars, for sale on the internet. Some of these sites are fairly convincing standalone pages and some are adverts on social media. In truth they are scammers. It also appears that these scammers target audiences a long way away from the area where the vehicle is based, so that they can charge a delivery fee too.

Buyers who are interested in buying these cars are then making payments of several thousand pounds for a vehicle, then waiting for it to be delivered. When



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the vehicle doesn't materialise, the purchaser has tried to contact the seller and found that their e-mails and phone calls go unheeded and any messages sent via messaging services gets them blocked.

Some warning signs to look out for if you are considering buying a second hand vehicle online:

- Buying vehicles over the internet from someone you don't know is inherently more risky than approaching a bricks and mortar business,
- The sellers are usually small, independent 'businesses',
- Vehicles are priced well below the sale price for similar vehicles advertised on major car retailers sites,
- This price differential is often explained by the vehicles being 'repossessions' but even so, these cars should still be selling around the normal sale price. If a car is too cheap, ask yourself why,
- Payment is usually made in full via direct bank transfer and the person being paid often has a different name from the company selling the vehicle,
- On occasion payment has been made by credit card, usually in full,
- Enquirers are often sent videos of the vehicles which have clearly been taken on the forecourts of large national car retailers,
- Photographs of the vehicles can often be seen from their backgrounds to have been taken on the forecourts of large national car retailers or in separate locations. Right click on these photos and search to see if it has been used anywhere else on the internet. Be suspicious if it has,
- The business addresses advertised are often located in residential streets rather than in commercial areas. Google maps, Google Street View (look for cars on display) or Bing maps can help with assessing this,

The more of the above red flags which apply, then the greater the risk to any potential buyer that it is all a scam. The truth of the matter is that these vehicles do not exist or the seller does not have legal ownership to sell them, they are simply bait; the photos and videos have been taken by the scammers without permission from legitimate traders' websites; the business information on the scammer's website or social media marketing site has been lifted from records on Companies House) from genuine companies who are not involved in the scam) and misused; initially scammers were targeting small independent car sales companies (often based in Scotland and some of which have been based in Aberdeenshire) and which have not been active recently but it now appears that they are targeting small, independent logistics and transport companies instead.

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If you are interested in buying vehicles remotely and online, please proceed cautiously and bear the above information in mind. Try to arrange a test drive and/or inspection of the vehicle too. It may also be worth doing your own online research first about the seller by Googling the name - before parting with any money. It may also be worth phoning nearby businesses and asking if they've heard of the seller. Remember, used car sellers normally cannot use logos of car manufacturers on their websites, which may be another red flag. Legitimate car sales businesses should also be registered with their local authorities, so it may be worthwhile contacting that Council to see if the business is registered with them. Look out for red flags. If in doubt, pull out.

Further information about this type of scam can be found on [the Car Dealer website which features a video from the BBC](#).

If you think you've been the victim of such a scam, please remember to report the matter to your bank or credit card company, to your local Trading Standards office and to Police Scotland. If you find a fake car dealer's website please report it to your local Trading Standards.

Misc.

Aberdeenshire Trusted Trader Scheme

Aberdeenshire Trusted Trader was launched on 22nd Sept 2023. It is a local business partnership to support Aberdeenshire consumers to identify reliable local and national trusted traders, while local traders benefit through increased market share and business opportunity.

The Aberdeenshire Trusted Trader scheme differs from national commercial schemes, it is entirely local and aimed at Aberdeenshire traders and consumers. Members are vetted by Trading Standards, a process that considers trading history, business practices and a commitment from the business to trade fairly. This hands-on approach, along with our local knowledge and understanding of legislative requirements, is the key strength of this scheme. All members have to follow a strict [Trusted Trader Code of Practice](#), ensuring accountability and protection for local residents and consumers.

Consumers who have had work carried out by a business found through the Aberdeenshire Trusted Trader scheme can leave a review, which will be published on the website to help other consumers make informed decisions when looking to employ a trader. Negative comments and disputes are reviewed, and if unresolved, parties have the option of taking the matter to dispute resolution.

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The primary focus of the scheme is the home improvement sector. Applicants must be based within Aberdeenshire or be able to show that a reasonable proportion of their business is carried out in Aberdeenshire. The fee is fully refundable in the event that the vetting requirements are not met. If an application is successful, then marketing materials will be provided to show potential customers that the business is a member of the Trusted Trader scheme. The material can be displayed at business premises, on paperwork, website and vehicles.

The annual fee is £240 (including VAT), with the first 25 members receiving a 50% discount, reducing the fee to £120 (including VAT) for the first 12 months.

If you are a business and want to find out more or apply to the scheme, please see the [Aberdeenshire Trusted Trader Sign Up page here](#).

Consumers can find out more about the scheme at the [Aberdeenshire Find a Trusted Trader page here](#) or by calling the Trusted Trader helpline on 0333 444 7016, Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm.

E-bikes and E-scooters

The following Alert is being circulated on behalf of Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS):

The Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) has published information for consumers to raise awareness around the safe purchasing, use and charging of e-bikes and e-scooters.

This follows a number of fire incidents involving lithium batteries in e-bikes and e-scooters, including in conversion kits.

The consumer awareness information will run on social media, as well as on GOV.UK. It contains messaging around safe use and charging of lithium batteries in e-bikes and scooters, including unplugging when charging has finished, and advice on using manufacturer recommended batteries and chargers.

As with all product safety advice, people are recommended to buy from known sellers, and check product reviews before buying.

Graham Russell, Chief Executive of OPSS said;
We are working across government and also with the fire service to fully understand why these fire incidents are taking place. As part of our safety study, we are reviewing all the information available to us in relation to fire incidents

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involving lithium batteries in e-bikes and e-scooters, including in conversion kits, to ensure the product safety issues are properly assessed and action is taken to protect users from harm. That's why we've published this consumer information, to help consumers be safe through knowing how they should use and charge these type of batteries.

Further safety information has been issued by Scottish Fire & Rescue Service.

[Read the information on charging e-bikes and e-scooters](#) – Scottish Fire & Rescue Service website.

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 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 the [Friends Against Scams website](#) or [Take Five](#) at their website.



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Please direct any media queries to 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](#).