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Doorstep Callers and Scams

Bulletin No. 79

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

A resident in the Garioch area recently reported to Trading Standards that he had had a doorstep caller, a roofer, at his door a couple of weeks ago. The roofer was going door-to-door delivering flyers and looking for work and was very persuasive and sounded credible. The roofer told the resident that he could repair any damaged or missing roof tiles and apply a coating which would provide additional protection to the roof during inclement weather. He also mentioned that the coating was best applied during a dry spell. The roofer quoted £9000 for the work but the resident, being vulnerable, agreed to the work being done, signed a contract and paid the full sum by bank transfer.

The roofer, who is based in central Scotland, started work immediately and without providing the resident with the legally required paperwork such as his rights when it came to cancelling the contract. The resident also noted that the roofer applied the coating soon after it had been raining to a damp roof, raising serious doubts in his mind, so he checked with another roofer about the rough cost of the treatment and was shocked to find that the work would normally cost about £1500.

As a result, the resident reported the matter to Trading Standards and our enquiries are ongoing. Unfortunately, this roofer is well known to us. The resident also reported the matter to his bank to see if a refund could be obtained via chargeback (see [Bulletin no. 38](#) for details about chargeback).

Some points to note:

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- Dealing with doorstep callers is an extremely risky business as you simply don't know who you're dealing with. It's far safer to simply say 'no thanks' rather than regret paying out large sums of money for shoddy or no work,
- In this case not only was the work done to a poor standard (the roof coating being applied when the roof was still damp, so not providing optimum protection), the job was overpriced by a factor of about 6 times,
- If a doorstep caller does highlight 'a problem' and it then bothers you (after the caller has been sent on his way, of course), contact a reputable trader by speaking to family, friends or neighbours and ask for their recommendations,
- Alternatively, search for a reputable trader on websites like [Checkatrade](#), [Trustatrader](#) or the recently created [Aberdeenshire Trusted Trader](#). Please don't go asking for recommendations or posting your requests on social media, or posting details of your jobs on certain trade websites as rogue traders monitor these places, looking for unsuspecting victims to rip off,
- Using a reliable website or having a tangible link to a trader is important, rather than reaching out into the internet at random, as is obtaining at least 3 quotes for the job you have in mind. Compare these quotes to each other and any figures offered by the doorstep caller and you may get quite a surprise,
- If you do have a doorstep caller at the door, remember, DO NOT get drawn into discuss money or prices. As soon as that happens, change the subject or fib; tell the caller you were thinking of putting the house on the market so don't want any unnecessary expenses beforehand,
- If the caller becomes persistent or persuasive, tell them you have a pot boiling on the stove or you have a caller in the house which you must attend to,
- If the caller becomes problematic, simply go inside and close the door,
- If the caller becomes aggressive, tell them you'll call the Police and, if necessary, do so,
- If you can, take note of the caller's description and details of any vehicle they're using such as the make, model, colour (ideally the registration number) and details of any businesses being advertised on the vehicle,
- To deter callers from even coming to your door, place 'No Cold Caller' signs at your gateway and at your front door, so they clearly get the message before they get to the door (these can be obtained from Trading Standards),
- Remember, you're under no obligation to answer the door to a caller,
- Consider installing a video doorbell at your front door. These can be installed by a competent DIY-er and will record a caller if they press the



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bell. It will also allow you to deal with a caller without actually going to the door,

- If you're concerned about repeated doorstep callers, consider joining or setting up a Neighbourhood Watch, Rural Watch or Farm Watch. Details of how to do this can be obtained by calling Police Scotland on 101 and asking to speak to your local Crime Reduction Officer,
- Likewise, you can ask the Crime Reduction Officer to do a (free) domestic security survey on your home which gives you the right advice on how to make your home more secure.

Remember too, if you get a doorstep caller at your home, report it to your local Trading Standards office. Contact details are at the bottom of this bulletin.

Scams etc.

Press 1 scam

A Stonehaven resident recently reported that he had received a phone call using a pre-recorded message and voice synthesiser from a mobile number ending '6021', which claimed to be from Visa, advising that there had been a suspicious transaction on his Visa Debit card for a sum of £900 and that to query the transaction, the resident should press 1 on his phone's keypad.

In truth, this was our old friend the 'Press 1' or 'robocall' scam which has moved from Amazon to Visa. Our advice for this type of scam remains unchanged:

- Amazon and Visa have no part in these scams, their names are simply being misused by scammers to lend the scam some credibility,
- NEVER press 1 or any other number on your phone's keypad in response to calls like these instead; simply hang up,
- If you do press 1, you will probably be placed in a queue on a high tariff phone line which can charge up to £3 per minute and, after being on hold for as much as 30 minutes, you'll be cut off without ever being able to speak to anyone,
- You'll also receive a nasty shock in your next phone bill and most of the cost of the call will go to the scammers. Phone companies are usually quite unsympathetic to complaints of scams like these and the bill will probably have to be paid.

Remember, like our resident, just HANG UP, dial 1471 and note the caller's number then report the matter to your local Trading Standards office so that we can take action.

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Misc.

As you may know, Trading Standards deals not only with scams but also a number of other fields, such as the sale of age restricted products such as cigarettes and disposable vapes. Please find below a recent article from the Journal of Trading Standards about similar work which is ongoing in another part of Scotland.

Warning to shops that broke the law

North Lanarkshire Council Trading Standards has been clamping down on underage sales in its local community, with a recent series of test purchases revealing a failure rate of 24%.

Officers assisted by young volunteers carried out 42 test purchases of age-restricted products, resulting in three sales of cigarettes and seven sales of vaping products to people under the legal age of 18.

Two of the shops inspected sold vapes without checking the customer's age for the third time. The owners and members of staff who made the sales were each given a £600 Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) and North Lanarkshire Trading Standards will apply for a banning order which could prevent them from selling tobacco and nicotine vapour products completely.

Another shop which illegally sold age-restricted products on two occasions received an FPN of £400, and retailers who did not follow the law on underage sales for the first time received FPNs of £200. All the shops will be retested by North Lanarkshire Trading Standards in the future.

Michelle McKenna, Trading Standards Manager at North Lanarkshire Council, said: "We carry out regular test purchase exercises to make sure retailers are following the rules, and these latest purchase attempts were targeted at shops we have received complaints about from the public.

"We want to make it clear that we will not tolerate retailers breaking the law and selling tobacco or nicotine vape products to anyone under the age of 18. Shop owners and staff have a responsibility to ask for proof of a customer's age before making a sale, challenging anyone who looks under 25 years old.

"If anyone has concerns about shops selling these products to underage customers, they can report it to trading standards to investigate."

Shirley Mawhinney, Senior Health Improvement Manager for Tobacco at NHS Lanarkshire, said: "Nicotine vapour products are designed to help adults give up



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smoking, but they are being targeted at young people with bright coloured packaging and low prices.

“We are only beginning to understand the health risks to under 18s but there is evidence of adverse reactions to vapes among children and the strong advice is not to use them.”

Since January 2023, Officers from North Lanarkshire Trading Standards have issued underage sales advice on nicotine vapour products on 194 occasions and on tobacco products on 177 occasions. They will continue to undertake unannounced checks on retailers to identify anyone breaking the law on underage sales.

Comment:

Aberdeenshire Council's Trading Standards team also undertakes a similar ongoing programme of test purchasing shops around Aberdeenshire, though notably our failure rate is lower than North Lanarkshire.

We are always keen to speak to 16 or 17 year olds who might be interested in taking part in these operations, which are perfectly legal and simply one way of testing if shops are adhering to existing laws which they should already be aware of. We are also keen to hear from people who have concerns with shops which may not be adhering to these laws. In either case, matters can be progressed, in confidence, using the contact details at the bottom of this bulletin.

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 Doorstep 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.



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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.

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](#).