

From mountain to sea

Doorstep Callers and Scams

Bulletin No. 73

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 of the Banff & Buchan area was recently approached outside his home by a group of men who claimed to be experienced tree surgeons. The men even provided the resident with a business card.

These men offered to do some work on the resident's trees for around £300, payable in cash or by cheque, though they were quite pushy about it. They even offered to come out at the weekend to do the work. These men claimed that the resident's trees were too close to nearby power lines, which might become dangerous.

The resident had two things in his favour. The first was that he knew from a previous home that if this was truly the case that he could contact his electricity supplier (from a phone number on his electricity bill) and the supplier would send out properly trained, qualified and equipped workmen to remedy the situation – at no cost to the resident.

The second thing in the resident's favour was that he receives these bulletins, so he followed the advice provided in them and remained calm and polite, but firm, and declined the offer. They all then lived happily ever after, except the men, who left in their van.

Scams etc.

Subscription Trap

Trading Standards were recent contacted by a resident of the Banff & Buchan area who wanted to alert us to what had recently happened to her.

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This resident had recently bought some sports clothing for her son online and paid for her purchases. A few weeks later she received an e-mail from a (different) sports clothing company which suggested that she may not have paid in full for her order. Being an honest person, the resident replied to the e-mail with her bank card details to redress the situation and make payment for any outstanding balance.

She did recall that there was a mention of monthly payments in the e-mail but was too busy to read it in detail. A few weeks later, she noticed that there were two payments of £30 each being taken from her bank account each month in the name of this company. Clearly, the e-mail came from scammers who had somehow become aware of the resident's purchase and the scammers were riding on the coat-tails of that transaction to instigate a subscription trap.

Some points to consider:

- When making online purchases, particularly if the company concerned is not one you use regularly, take the time to ensure that you receive your order in full and that payment has been made to the company by checking your bank statement, PayPal statement etc. This will ensure that you have exactly what you ordered and that no payment or part-payment is still outstanding,
- When you receive an e-mail requesting payment for goods or services, take the time to confirm that the e-mail is from the company who you've ordered goods from. In this case, the resident had been misled into believing that she was owe them money, but in truth, she wasn't,
- Never part with your bank card details in response to an unsolicited e-mail, particularly if you're not sure who the e-mail sender is. If you're not sure, find out,
- If you believe the e-mail sender may be a scammer, send the e-mail to your Junk or Spam folder and block the sender,
- If you think the e-mail is based on a misunderstanding somewhere, contact the company concerned and raise your concerns with them. Ask for a refund in full if you've paid any money and that they delete your data from their computers. It may be worth doing a little research on the internet about the company before you contact them. If you suspect they may be scammers, don't contact them,
- If you think you've been the victim of such a scam or subscription trap, report the matter timeously to your bank, enquire about a refund and ask that any future payments be prevented,
- If you think you've been the victim of such a scam or subscription trap, report the matter timeously to Trading Standards and/or Police Scotland to investigate. Contact details are at the end of this bulletin.

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Telephone Scam

One resident of the Garioch area recently reported that his vulnerable mother had been called at home by an 'insurance' company on the phone. This company had managed to persuade the vulnerable lady that she needed breakdown insurance cover for her boiler (despite her living in a housing complex) and that she should pass on her bank details. This insurance company then deducted £200 from the lady's bank account.

This transaction only came to the attention of the lady's son a few days later. He then tried repeatedly to call the company, all to no avail, so he began sending repeated e-mails to the company, eventually managing to get a reply, an apology and latterly, a refund.

However, several weeks later, the company deducted a further £200 from the lady's account. Again, this was picked up by her son a few days later. He again began trying to contact the company to get an apology and a refund, so far unsuccessfully. That said, the lady's bank did step in and refunded her lost money.

It has been some time since we featured a scam like this in the Bulletin, but our advice remains the same:

- Never agree to sign up to an insurance policy as a result of a cold call,
- Fear of something terrible happening, like breakdowns or burst pipes, is often a tactic used by these scammers. Stop for a moment and consider what they're saying. In this instance, as the victim lived in a housing complex, her water boiler was communal and the complex management's responsibility, so she had no need for this insurance. This may be the case for you too, if you receive such a call,
- Most domestic insurance policies will allow you to add 'home emergency' cover to your existing policy. This will often be a good deal cheaper than a completely new policy, so it may be worth checking up on and taking proactive measures if you're concerned with any such problems developing,
- With items like boilers, problems can be largely averted by annual servicing rather than acting when a problem develops. It may also work out cheaper and less stressful in the longer term,
- If you are being pestered by scammers or high pressure sales calls, the simplest short-term tactic just is to hang up,
- If these calls are a persistent problem, it may be worth speaking to your telephony provider to see if they have a call interception/blocking service



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(there may be a small charge for this service) or it may be worth obtaining a call blocking device (see the next article),

- If you have had problems similar to this with 'insurance' companies, it may be worthwhile keeping a close eye on your bank statements in case, as with this instance, the company tries to bill you once again at a later date. Report any anomalies to your bank immediately.

Clearly, in this instance, matters were more complicated by the fact that the victim was a vulnerable person. In these circumstances, if you care for a vulnerable person, it may be worth considering having a regular discussion with them to see if they are receiving high pressure sales calls (particularly if any of these callers have been asking for payment of any sort or bank/card details). If they are, it may then be worth obtaining a call blocker device, then compiling and regularly updating a 'white list' of trusted callers whose calls won't be intercepted by the call blocker.

If you think either you or a vulnerable person you care for has fallen victim to such a scam, please remember to report the matter timeously to your local Trading Standards department, Police Scotland and your bank.

Misc.

Free Call Blocking devices

From Monday 14th August 2023, and in partnership with [trueCall](#), Friends Against Scams have been offering free call blocking devices to people who have been receiving scam and nuisance phone calls.

In 2019, a similar scheme resulted in a big reduction in scam calls and greater wellbeing with over 91% of scam and nuisance calls blocked to users of these types of devices and 99% of successful applicants who were provided with a call blocking device felt happier that they were no longer receiving these sorts of calls.

Further information about this year's project and how to make an application for a call blocking devices can be found by clicking the link to [Friends Against Scams Home page](#). Please note that there is a limited supply of these devices. You can also keep up to date with the types of scams being reported to Friends Against Scam Alerts by clicking on their [Scams Alert](#) page.

#CallBlockers #ScamAware

Conclusion



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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.

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](#).