

From mountain to sea

# Trading Standards Bulletin

## Bulletin No. 41

### **Doorstep Crime/ Cold Calling**

We have recently received a report from the Buchan area of a man who goes door to door flyering his services as a gardener. This same man is suspected of fly tipping garden waste on private land which will cost the landowner a substantial amount of money to clean up. We are also aware that he is not registered with SEPA for a Waste Carrier's Licence and so is unlikely to pay the fees for commercial waste services to the Council. This selfish individual would rather pocket his gains and let someone else clean up his mess.

Members of the public enlisting gardeners, landscapers, roofers or anyone who transports someone else's waste as part of their business can help reduce the instances of fly-tipping by asking to see the trader's SEPA Waste Carrier's Registration Document (often just referred to as a SEPA Licence). If they can't produce one, there's a possibility that your waste may end up being dumped once it's left your location.

Trading Standards ask that you stick only to those tradesmen who can produce their SEPA Licence.

Details of the SEPA Document can be found at:

<https://www.sepa.org.uk/regulations/waste/waste-carriers-and-brokers/>

### **Scams**

#### **Verification Code scam**

Although not in Aberdeenshire, but important nonetheless as it is a scam which could be perpetrated anywhere; a resident in Moray was recently called on her mobile phone from a blocked number by someone claiming to be from her bank, to report suspicious activity on her bank account. The caller then asked the resident for the verification code which had just been texted to her, which the resident gave, resulting in a substantial loss from her account.

The truth of the matter was that the caller was a scammer who had tried to access the resident's bank account online, triggering the bank to send out a real verification code to the resident. When the resident passed the code, that was the final piece of the jigsaw the scammer needed to access her bank account.



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If you receive such a call from a 'bank' asking for a verification code, please NEVER give it up. The caller could be anyone and the bank should have no need for the code.

Importantly, the scammer would have needed some of the resident's personal and banking information already, such as passwords and PIN numbers. This might have been obtained a number of ways; stealing bank statements from rubbish bags or bins, or accessing written details from notebooks or similar. These possibilities underscore the need to store confidential information securely and disposing of it by shredding or burning, rather than simply throwing it in the bin.

### HMRC Scam

A resident from the Garioch ward recently reported a notable scam to Trading Standards which is based on making a tax a claim to HMRC.

The company concerned sends out e-mails to potential customers advising them that they could make a claim to HMRC if they have been working from home recently or if they wear a uniform as part of their work duties.

The company offers to act as the customer's agent in making the claim to HMRC for any overpaid taxes and refunds due. A binding contract is then agreed between the company and the customer. However, what is not disclosed to the customer is that any pay-out from HMRC is made to the company firstly and they will then take their fees of about a third of the pay-out before giving the customer the remainder. As the company is acting as the customer's agent, HMRC must make the pay-out to the company. In the instance reported to Trading Standards, the company concerned took over £1000 for their services.

In many instances if someone is due a tax rebate, HMRC will attend to it automatically but if you believe you may be due a rebate which has not been paid, a good place to start the process of claiming is via HMRC directly via their website at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-revenue-customs> and to ignore offers from commercial companies to do so on your behalf.

### Misc.

#### Spoofting

One north Aberdeenshire resident recently received a phone call from a number which showed up on the Caller ID as being another local number. When the resident answered the call, a male with a foreign accent spoke, claiming to be



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from a well-known media company. The resident immediately realised that it was a scam or sales call and hung up.

Scams are big business these days and scammers often use computers to assist them, some as auto-dialers to go through a list of phone numbers successively looking for a victim and some to disguise (spoof) the real number from which they're calling behind a local number. Trading Standards would like to reinforce that just because a local number appears on your Caller ID that it won't be a scammer or a high pressure sales call on the line, especially if it's an unknown number or a call at a strange time of the day, and we would ask that you still remain vigilant and don't pass any personal information until you're satisfied the call is genuine.

If you think you've received a call from a spoofed number, you may be able to obtain the number via the 1471 facility or by contacting your service provider. We would ask that you then contact Trading Standards to report the matter.

### **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. We can also help you with advice about any article mentioned in these bulletins.

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](mailto: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>