



From mountain to sea

Trading Standards Bulletin

Bulletin No. 40

Doorstep Crime/ Cold Calling

One resident in the Buchan area recently received a phone call from a person claiming to be an art dealer calling from a London (020) number, who was clearly trying to drum up new business. They tried to get the resident to sell her shares, to invest in a piece of artwork by Salvador Dali.

Initially the resident ended the call but the caller called back twice, becoming pushier each time. The caller thereafter asked the resident for her personal details, which the resident gave. A few days later a package arrived by courier for the resident from Spain, purporting to be a binding contract between the resident and the caller, stating that the resident had agreed to buy this piece of artwork and that the sale would be effected on 1 June 2022, costing the resident £1525.

This appears to be very similar to scams which have been reported in other parts of the country. The truth of the matter is that the resident had not agreed to any such contract, had not signed it and that it was unenforceable. The scam depended on the resident being overawed by the formality of it all. In such circumstances, we would advise that anyone who receives such a call should never give out their personal details to cold callers, but simply hang up as soon as they realise that it is a scam. If the caller becomes persistent or the number of such calls are becoming problematic it might be worth considering a call blocking device or speaking to your telephone provider about their call blocking services.

Scams

Phishing Scam

One Mearns resident recently received a phone call from someone who claimed that they could help her reclaim £6000 back on her Council Tax due to a re-banding exercise. The resident became suspicious when the caller asked for her bank card details to pay a fee for the service.

The resident then told the caller that she would check with Aberdeenshire Council. The caller told the resident; it was a waste of time checking, the Council don't know about the re-banding and that the caller's company was separate from the Council.

In truth, this was a scam. The Council are the only organisation which would deal with Council Tax matters; it's also extremely unlikely that an external

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company would be involved in such an exercise and virtually impossible that Council would not know about it. Most likely, the caller was phishing for bank card details to then commit dishonesties with the resident's details. Thankfully, the resident wasn't fooled.

Advance Fee Fraud

Unfortunately, another resident in the Marr area wasn't so lucky. He received a letter advising that he'd won a large sum of money in a timeshare competition but that he would have to pay nearly £4000 to release the prize.

Believing that it was genuine, the resident sent off a cheque as requested but then heard nothing more, though he was then bombarded by other similar phone calls. Later, it transpired that the whole thing was a scam; there had been no competition and no prize.

This type of scam is called an Advance Fee Fraud, often where scammers convince a victim that they have won a big prize, be it cash, holidays, cars or similar, although this type of scam can come in many guises. All the victim has to do is send a sum of money, whether it's called an admin fee, an insurance fee, a shipping fee etc., to the scammer for the prize to be released.

Usually, when the victim has made payment, one of two things happens; either a new fee is requested (sometimes more than one in succession, to keep the victim paying) or the scammer simply cease all communications. Eventually, the victim is left high and dry.

The elements of this scam are:

- An unsolicited communication, whether e-mail, phone call, letter etc.
- The promise of a great benefit whether it's cash, prizes, a job, romance...
- A request for a smaller sum of cash to cover fees, expenses before the benefit can be realised.

As with the old adage, "If it seems too good to be true, it probably is" and a newer one "You've got to be in it to win it". If you don't recall entering a competition for said cash or prize, how would the caller legitimately know who you are and have your contact details? If you didn't apply for a job or actively seek a partner (perhaps on a dating website), how and why would the caller pluck your name out of the ether? These questions should be satisfactorily answered before you decide to part with money (which is the usual objective of these scams).

Far safer to put that e-mail in the 'spam' folder, that letter in the bin or if you are being pestered by phone calls, as in the first article above, consider a call blocking device or service.

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Covid Texts

You may recall that in Bulletin 38 we published an article about scam Covid texts telling recipients that they had been in contact with someone who had tested positive for the Omicron variant. These texts continue to do the rounds in sizeable numbers. Some other indicators that the text is a scam are:

- There is no 'www' prefix in the web address in the body of the text
- There are fairly basic spelling mistakes in the wording of the text
- If you click on the link in the text and go down the rabbit hole far enough (not recommended) you will see that you will be asked for personal details to post the kit to you at a cost of less than £2. No business would survive on this margin alone.

Indications are that this is a phishing scam, looking to obtain peoples' personal details to sell onto other criminals who will then target them with other scams. Please don't respond to the texts but forward them to '7726' so that the telephone providers can block them.

Misc.

As previously mentioned in these Bulletins, Trading Standards monitors the sale of tobacco products and cigarettes, amongst a number of other age restricted products.

Wednesday 9 March 2022, will be national No Smoking Day. This year's theme is 'Quit Your Way'. If you are considering cutting down or stopping smoking, more information can be found at <https://www.ashscotland.org.uk/nosmokingday>



No Smoking Day
9 March 2022

Find your unique quit plan today and
QUIT YOUR WAY!
You are 4 times more likely to quit for good
with specialist support.



 www.ashscotland.org.uk
 0800 84 84 84

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Taking Action on Smoking and Health

#QuitYourWay #NoSmokingDay #NSD2022

ASH (Action on Smoking & Health) Scotland is a registered Scottish charity (SC 054922) and a company limited by guarantee (limited company no 16011)

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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 Information

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.

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>