

From mountain to sea

Trading Standards Bulletin

Bulletin No. 35

Doorstep Crime/ Cold Calling

Nothing to report.

Scams

One resident from the Formartine area recently reported having problems with a roofer they had found via an online search engine. The roofer viewed the roof then provided a verbal quote for the work to be done. The resident asked for the quote in writing, which the roofer promised before the work started. The resident later had to phone the roofer again to ask for the quote in writing before any work started. Reputable tradesmen will provide this paperwork without having to be chased.

A few days later the roofer arrived unannounced and started work. A little later the roofer advised that he had found more problems with the roof which would almost triple the original quote. Despite the roofer making a terrible mess and standing directly on the conservatory, the resident was committed so felt compelled to get the work completed. Once the work was done, the roofer asked the resident to write out the invoice instead of doing it himself, making excuses about doing so. The resident was reluctant to pay the roofer and again asked for a proper invoice but gave in when the roofer phoned, demanding payment and becoming very angry at the resident's hesitation. It was also only later that the resident did an online search on the roofer and found his history of dishonesty and coercive behaviour.

Unfortunately, in this situation the resident made the fundamental mistake of searching for a roofer online instead of getting recommendations from trusted sources such as friends and neighbours and all of their subsequent problems flowed from that decision. Also, they only discovered the roofer's shady history after they were committed. Clearly in this scenario, the importance of obtaining the right paperwork from a trader is also underscored as this roofer prevaricated in providing a written quote before the work started and had the resident write out the invoice after it was complete, all to avoid providing the resident with hard evidence of their involvement in this work. As described in more detail in previous bulletins (nos. 25, 28 and 30) consumers have a number of statutory

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rights which appear to have been waived in this instance, to the resident's cost. Details of how to access the above bulletins can be found at the end of this one.

Another resident in Aberdeenshire recently received an e-mail containing an offer of a very attractive job as a businessman's personal assistant. Some of the features of the job were working from home, flexible hours which could also work round existing employment, working without supervision, mail pick-ups and deliveries, running personal errands and some clerical duties. All the e-mail recipient had to do was provide the sender with their full personal details and, from the tone of the e-mail, the job was theirs.

However, the benefits of the job gave away that it was a scam. The wages were \$670 per week, a 401(k) plan and AD&D Insurance were included. Obviously the wages were couched in US dollars rather than pounds Sterling, a 401(k) plan is an American name for a type of pension plan and the AD&D insurance relates to accidental death and dismemberment insurance which is also an American term (which also seems to be at odds with the job description above – AD&D for clerical work?). Added to these that the 'reply to' e-mail address had the suffix 'dk' which relates to Denmark.

It's unclear at this stage if the intent of the e-mail was to harvest the details of the recipient for selling to other scammers or to have the recipient make financial transactions on behalf of the sender believing that they would be reimbursed, though in all likelihood no reimbursement would ever take place.

As with all such e-mails, it is a fairy story so we recommend that you don't reply to it and simply consign it to the Spam folder.

Misc.

Counterfeit Goods

One topic which Trading Standards receives quite a number of phone calls about is counterfeit goods. Usually, people have gone onto social media and knowingly or unwittingly bought goods which are counterfeit, i.e., manufactured by someone who does not have lawful authority to do so.

In most cases counterfeit goods, as well as being illegal, are of substantially lower quality than the genuine article. In the case of counterfeit cigarettes this has direct health implications for the consumer in that the substances used in counterfeit cigarettes are profoundly more damaging than the legal substances. In the case of certain types of clothing there is a higher fire risk to the wearer. Similarly with sunglasses, in that counterfeit sunglasses will not give the same protection from UV rays to the wearer's eyesight as the real thing would.

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Some people who sell counterfeit goods, and some who buy them, justify this by asking “what harm does it do?”. If the buyer purchases goods believing that they are genuine and the seller knows they are not, this is a criminal matter, most likely fraud, or an offence under the Trade Marks Act 1994 if the goods have a counterfeit registered trade mark applied to them. Someone who unwittingly buys fake goods which don’t wear or perform as well as the real thing, may develop a negative view of a product or company, share that view with friends who then vow never to buy that company’s goods in future, so the company concerned suffers reputational damage and lost future sales as a result.

Even when both parties know the goods aren’t genuine, what are the implications of these transactions? Firstly, the owner of the trade mark or patent has intellectual property rights in that they own the design of the product. Imagine if you had created a unique product which had taken substantial amounts of money and years of your life to perfect, you’d managed to take it to market and were waiting to receive the just rewards of your labours when some upstart pops up and makes a cheaper, poorer quality version for a fraction of the price, depriving you of the profits you’ve worked for. Companies are in a similar situation in that counterfeiting might affect their income and ability to pay wages to their workers and the bills to keep their factories running.

Also, there’s a high likelihood that the seller of the product doesn’t pay taxes on the income they make from selling it. You have to pay your taxes, so why shouldn’t they? Lower tax revenues every year for the HM Treasury, in the region of several billions of pounds, also means less money to spend on public services. So, we are all poorer for that.

Back in the country of origin, investigations have shown that employees there are often paid a pittance in wages, work long hours in difficult conditions where health and safety is almost non-existent. Some counterfeit manufacturers have been found to direct their profits into the drugs trade, further fueling that industry and strengthening ties between counterfeiting and organised crime.

Hopefully, this short article has gone a little way to show the effects of the trade in counterfeit goods. Further reading on the impact of counterfeit goods can be found at <https://www.oecd.org/gov/risk/trade-in-counterfeit-products-and-uk-economy-report-update-2019.pdf> where even a quick scan of the Executive Summary is very informative.

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 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.

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, 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.

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>