

From mountain to sea

Doorstep Callers and Scams

Bulletin No. 65

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.

Doorstep Callers

A resident of the Formartine area recently contacted Trading Standards about a neighbour who had been approached by a group of four men claiming to be gardeners. They claimed to have been doing work nearby and thought that this resident's garden could also do with some work. The oldest man, who appeared to be their spokesman, offered to do some pruning work in the back garden and provided an estimate of over £2000 for the work. The men also offered to lay polythene and a layer of gravel in the front garden but said that this would cost extra.

The men provided the resident with a small flyer which had an 0800 phone number and a mobile number on it, along with the name of their 'company'.

The men also advised that they would need payment deposited into three separate, personal bank accounts 'for materials'. Feeling pressurised, the resident agreed to the work, then the men left in their large white van but after having some time to think about it the resident then changed his mind and did not make any payments and reported the matter (as did his neighbour).

Some points to be noted:

- Over £2000 for some pruning work in the average garden seems grossly excessive,
- Payment into 3 separate accounts is highly peculiar if not downright suspicious rather than into one account,
- All of the accounts to be paid were personal accounts rather than a business account which raises suspicions further about either the men were rogue traders or trying to avoid taxes, or both,
- Payment for all materials up front is a risky matter as, if the caller is a rogue, he could easily disappear with the money and never return to do any work,

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As with any doorstep caller, Trading Standards advises:

- Don't accept any offers from doorstep callers. Thank them for their concern and go inside or close the door if they're on the doorstep,
- Tell them that you have a family member who is that line of work and that you'd like to give them the work, particularly as there's a cost of living crisis on,
- Don't discuss money with them if at all possible as they will reduce prices again and again to break your resolve. Remember, they could be scammers,
- Try to note details of the callers: numbers, sex, ethnicity, age, height, build, accent and anything unusual about them (which makes them memorable),
- Try to note details of the make, model, colour and (if possible) registration number of their vehicle(s),
- Try to note details from their vehicles of business names, phone numbers, addresses, etc.
- Hold onto any flyers or other paperwork they might give you,
- If they become insistent, tell them you have something on the stove inside which will boil over, so you really must go,
- If they still refuse to move, tell them you will call the Police,
- If they still refuse to move, shut the door and call the Police,
- In any case, report the matter to Police Scotland or Trading Standards (contact details below) once they've left,
- Fix 'No Cold Callers' stickers and notices at the garden gate and front door, to deter doorstep callers from coming on to your property (Trading Standards can provide these stickers).

Scams etc.

Tax scam

One resident in the Buchan area recently contacted Trading Standards to report that he had received an e-mail from someone purporting to be a tax advisor, suggesting that he could be eligible for a tax rebate on his marriage allowance. (It is unclear how the sender obtained the resident's e-mail address.) The resident replied to the sender to find out more and received a further e-mail which had an attachment which contained a claims form. However, once he opened the form the resident found this form already had his electronic signature and that of his wife on it.

Now realising that it was probably a scam, the resident ceased all further contact with the sender and reported the matter to Trading Standards. However, the sender then began e-mailing the resident repeatedly, warning him that we would

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be charged £300 for not competing and returning the form. Needless to say, this caused the resident a great deal of anxiety though the e-mails seem to have abated.

Some points to remember:

- Always be cautious of an e-mail from an unknown sender,
- Look for signs of impersonal greetings like 'Dear Sir' or 'Dear Customer', this is often a tell-tale sign of a scammer,
- Scammers often try to 'hook' their victim by promises of financial gain,
- Scammers will often urge victims to act quickly or not to disclose the e-mail to other people,
- The e-mail may contain obvious spelling or grammatical errors,
- The sender's e-mail address may not tally with the company web address which is mentioned in the e-mail,
- By hovering your cursor over the sender's e-mail address, you may find that a different e-mail address pops up (this is the sender's real e-mail address)

Steps to take if you receive such an e-mail:

- Don't click on any links in the e-mail, this could take you to a scam website or open your device to a malware attack,
- Don't open attachments on the e-mail, they may contain a computer virus,
- Don't reply to the e-mail, this will simply confirm to the scammer that your e-mail address is live and they or other scammers may target you further,
- Send the e-mail to the 'spam' or 'junk' folder provided by your e-mail supplier or
- Send the e-mail on to the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) at report@phishing.gov.uk where they will investigate the e-mail. Details of what the NCSC then do can be found [here](#).

'Hi Mum' Text Scam

In previous bulletins we have highlighted a text scam relating to a child having broken their phone and texting their mother. The full content of the text is similar to "Mum I smashed my phone and I'm using a friends phone to message you, their phone is about to die. Could you message me on my new number asap it's...(unfamiliar mobile phone number in this space).

Please be aware that this text is still doing the rounds, as was recently reported by a resident of south Aberdeenshire. This is a variation of a similar, older, e-mail scam (which became a WhatsApp scam) which usually also asked for the recipient to transfer money to the sender of the message as they'd been victim of some catastrophe, often abroad.

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Our enquiries into the text scam suggest that scammer is posing as an adult child contacting their parent for help and if anyone responds to the original message they are asked to continue the matter by text (as the parent would realise straight away if they spoke to the scammer that it's not their child) and it usually ends with the scammer asking the parent to transfer a sum of money into a bank account to help the 'child' out with paying some large and unexpected bill (which might otherwise be credible, in this cost of living crisis).

Should you receive such a text and you think that it may actually be from your child, some steps you can take:

- Insist on speaking to the sender in person,
- If the sender provides you with bank account details, if you can, compare these with your child's bank account number and sort code,
- If in any doubt, DO NOT transfer any money.

If you are satisfied that the sender is not your child, either from the outset or after the above scenario:

- End all contact with the scammer,
- Block their mobile number on your phone,
- If you can, report the scam to your telephone service provider on the text number 7726, so that they can take steps to block the number,
- Or, if you can't do the above, forward the text to the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) at report@phishing.gov.uk in the form of a screen shot for them to investigate.

Further information on how to deal with scam texts on various types of phones can also be found [here](#).

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 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.



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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 or to Keep It Out at <https://keep-it-out.co.uk/anonymous-reporting/>

Contact Info

For non-urgent Trading Standards enquiries in Aberdeenshire, please contact Consumer Advice Scotland at <https://www.consumeradvice.scot/> or 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 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>