

From mountain to sea

Doorstep Callers and Scams

Bulletin No. 81

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](#).

Bogus Callers and Rogue Traders

Trading Standards have recently taken a number of reports from across Aberdeenshire, including but not confined to areas such as Huntly, Newburgh, Portlethen and Stonehaven of a number of males doorstep calling at their homes, trying to sell cleaning materials from bags which they carry with them. Their manner and appearance have caused sufficient concern to the residents that they have (rightly) reported the matter.

These men claim that they are variously:

- Just released from prison,
- Are on a prison release programme,
- Have just been discharged from the army,

On at least one occasion the male concerned presented as being under the influence of alcohol or drugs and on another occasion a male was seen trying the resident's door handle (which was thankfully locked). On more than one occasion when the resident has questioned the caller, he has become aggressive. Also, on more than one occasion, the male concerned flashed some sort of ID badge to the resident but without actually allowing them to see it properly. Reports also indicate that these males have predominantly English accents.

All of the above are the classic signs of bogus callers termed 'Nottingham Knockers', so called as the phenomenon is believed to have started in Nottingham. Historic reports indicate that these males have sold poor quality cleaning and gardening tools and materials at over-inflated prices and that items

From mountain to sea

have gone missing from residents' gardens and driveways after the males have left. Some further points to note:

- The Scottish Prison Service runs no such release programme as mentioned above,
- Going door to door and selling goods in this manner, such as cleaning products, is termed 'peddling' and those doing so are pedlars. The law requires pedlars to have a pedlar's certificate to do so. These are granted by Police Scotland and it is an offence for a person to peddle without a certificate,
- The men on foot usually have a 'colleague' nearby in a vehicle, whose task it is to transport the males from area to area,

As can also be seen from the preceding information, dealing with these males can be quite challenging. We would recommend that residents who are cold called at their door by these males, consider the following:

- Due to reports of their apparent drug misuse and aggressive behaviour, it is imperative that residents remain calm and tactful when dealing with the males. Politely but firmly decline their wares. Do not get drawn into any form of argument or confrontation with them,
- There have been no reports of these males trying to talk their way into peoples' houses but it is imperative that you keep them out. As a general rule, it is wise to keep your doors and ground floors windows closed (and preferably locked), to prevent any unauthorised access, regardless of where you stay,
- Be sure to apply door chains or door bars before opening the door to any unknown caller. If you don't have one installed, we would strongly recommend getting one fitted. This doesn't require a joiner but can be done by any competent DIY-er,
- There are other devices, generically called door-jammers, which can do a similar job, by depressing a pedal which pushes a pad down to the floor. These can also be installed at the back of a door by any competent DIY-er and work best on carpeted floors rather than laminated floors,
- If you have a 'fish-eye' door viewer fitted to your door, please use it before opening it to an unknown caller. These can also be fitted by any competent DIY-er into most doors,
- Consider also using a video doorbell to converse with the caller, if you have one,
- If one of these males comes to your door, once they have left, take a few minutes to scan your garden or driveway for anything lying about which might have some value, be portable and could be targeted for theft. Place these items under lock and key in the shed, garage etc. Include

From mountain to sea

any tools which might be used as a lever to force open doors or windows or any ladders which might be used to access first floor windows, balconies etc,

- Contact your neighbours and advise them about the caller, especially if you are a member of a Neighbourhood Watch scheme,
- Remember to report the matter to Police Scotland in the first instance and to your local Trading Standards afterwards (Police Scotland are aware of these incidents).

Remember the watchword – “If in doubt, keep them out”.

Scams etc.

Letter Scam

One resident of south Aberdeenshire recently received a notable letter in the post. It claimed to be from a Fund Manager for a bank based in Brisbane, Australia, acting on behalf of a client who had recently died along with his family during a holiday in Burma. The letter went on to advise that the client was a UK national but his Next of Kin could not be located; that he had nearly £10 million pounds sitting in a dormant account with the bank; that the matter of disbursing this sum had recently become urgent; that there was no risk to the resident (a blatant lie) and that the recipient of the letter be named as beneficiary simply because he shared the same surname as the deceased client.

Needless to say, the letter was a scam and the resident was not taken in by it. No doubt, had he replied to it, he would have had to pay fees, duty or admin costs of some sort to get his hands on the £10 million and that after his first payment there would be requests for further payments due to ‘unforeseen circumstances’ and, at the end of the day, the resident would have been strung along, paid out thousands of pounds and never seen a penny of the ten million. Thankfully, he was a wiser man than that.

Some points to consider:

- The story of the client’s untimely demise was in reality a sob story to gain the reader’s sympathies,
- The mention of the ten million pounds (which did not exist) was simply intended to pique the reader’s interest (the hook) at the possibility of gaining untold riches with little or no effort (which is everyone’s dream),
- Close examination of the envelope showed that the letter had been posted in the UK, despite the sender claiming to be in Australia,

From mountain to sea

- Close examination of the letter showed a number of spelling and grammatical mistakes which a professional would not make and the use of a number of different fonts in the text of the letter,
- The country of Burma is called Myanmar these days and has been for a number of years,
- The chances of someone who is astute enough to amass ten million pounds in wealth then leave it in a dormant bank account seems unlikely and somewhat contradictory,
- Though the sender claims to work for a bank in Australia, at no point does he name the bank in the letter or does it feature in his postal return address or e-mail address,
- An online check for news articles about the deaths of a family of British nationals on holiday in Burma (or Myanmar)(and which would be very newsworthy) drew a blank,
- A quick check on the e-mail checking service [Email Checker](#) warns that the sender's e-mail address is not valid,
- The biggest elephant in the room is that disbursing someone's estate in this fashion would not be legal in the UK or in Australia.

It is likely that this resident is not the only person to receive such a letter and much more likely that large numbers of letters like these have been sent out to unsuspecting people, some of whom due to personal circumstances might be tempted to go along with the request. Unfortunately, it is a scam and we would ask that if you do receive such a letter, please do not respond to it. Instead, save the envelope and letter and report the matter to your local Trading Standards office so that we can alert others through this bulletin and local radio broadcasts.

Misc.

Nothing to report.

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.



From mountain to sea

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](#).