

From mountain to sea

Trading Standards Bulletin

Bulletin No. 45

Doorstep Crime/ Cold Calling

One resident in the Garioch area recently saw workmen at her vulnerable neighbour's property, working on the driveway. Sensing something was amiss she went to investigate and found one workman spraying a black tar-like substance on the drive. When the resident asked the man what he was doing he advised he was repairing a small hole. However, when she asked him to stop, he quickly became abusive.

The resident entered her neighbour's home to check on her and ask what was happening. The neighbour advised that the workmen had come to her door earlier that morning and offered to repair the small hole in the drive for £800 and that she had been too frightened to say no, so had consented. No paperwork had been provided and the men had started work straight away. The resident went back outside and insisted that the men stop work immediately. The foreman became highly abusive but the men all left, in their three vehicles when the neighbour began filming them on her mobile phone. Details of the workmen and their vehicles have been passed to Trading Standards and later Police Scotland. Enquiries are ongoing.

If you don't feel confident in dealing with cold callers at the door:

- speak to a trusted neighbour or friend who lives nearby to see if they would be willing to act as your nominated neighbour, dealing with cold callers to your home on your behalf,
- place 'No Cold Caller' stickers or notices near to your gateway and/or front door to make it plain to visitors that cold callers are not welcome (these can be obtained from Trading Standards or online from reputable retailers for just a few pounds),
- if a cold caller comes to the door, you don't have to answer or open the door, simply call your nominated neighbour to see if they can assist you,
- if the caller refuses to leave your doorstep, especially if your nominated neighbour is unavailable, phone the Police,

If you are a nominated neighbour:

- don't let the caller enter your home,
- if possible, don't let the caller enter your neighbour's home either,

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- make sure both properties are secured from people sneaking in whilst your attention is elsewhere,
- never leave the caller alone in either house or permit them to move freely about the property,
- check the caller's ID carefully and verify it with their company, if possible,
- look the company number up in the Phone Book rather than relying on information on the caller's ID card,
- whatever happens, see the caller out of your neighbour's house,
- if a caller or workman becomes aggressive or abusive, withdraw for your own safety rather than risk making the situation worse,
- try to avoid getting into confrontations or arguments,
- get inside and call the Police on 999 if it becomes an emergency or 101 if not,

Further information is available from Police Scotland at

<https://www.scotland.police.uk/advice-and-information/scams-and-frauds/doorstep-crime-and-bogus-callers/> and from Take Five at
<https://www.takefive-stopfraud.org.uk/advice/general-advice/doorstep-scam/>

Scams

Trading Standards were recently contacted by another resident in the Garioch area who reported that she had seen a free competition in a post on a popular social medium to win a mini break in the UK, so had entered it by clicking on the link provided. This had taken the resident to the trader's own website where she was asked to input her personal details to enter the competition, which she did.

The resident was later contacted by the trader to advise that she hadn't won the competition but had won a runner's up prize which was a generous discount on a hotel booking. Discussions then took place between the trader and the resident about which hotel the resident would like, which dates she would like and that the accommodation was free at that time. Once this had all been completed, the resident paid the discounted fee for the accommodation and was e-mailed a hyperlink by the trader to make the booking with.

When the resident tried to make the booking with the hotel using the link, she was advised that there was no accommodation free between those dates (despite the trader telling her that there was). Also, the trader flatly refused to provide a refund. A complaint has been raised with the resident's credit card company. More worryingly, in the T&C's of the 'competition' it states that the trader will call the consumer up after the selected dates and if the consumer



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does not take the call, the trader can then charge the consumer's debit or credit card the full price of the mini break.

It also turns out that the trader's listed address in Regent Street, London is a well-known 'virtual office' address, i.e., a postal address run by a separate company, with no physical presence there of the trader. Further enquiry also suggests that the trader is based in Spain, despite using a UK 0800 number and having a '.co.uk' website address.

When it comes to competitions being offered on social media, please be extremely wary. Points to look out for are:

- On the social medium page there is no blue dot with white tick to show that the trader has been verified by that medium,
- Look for comments on the page which indicates or suggests that the competition is a scam,
- Many of the competitions on social media are scams which simply attempt to harvest victims personal details for further scams and a common way of doing this is via a hyperlink which takes the victim to a new web page, away from the original site, often to the 'trader's' own site,
- Pages which have only been created in the last few months, suggesting that they may have been set up specifically for that scam,
- Look for common spelling or grammatical mistakes or poor use of the language
- If in any doubt, take the safe option and don't enter the competition, simply move onto the next post,
- If you do fall victim, call Trading Standards for advice. Contact details are at the bottom of this bulletin.

Misc.

Aberdeenshire Council's Trading Standards searched two addresses in Fraserburgh where an estimated 18,000 illegal cigarettes were uncovered in a residential property and commercial premises in the town on Friday, March 6th, 2022.

Search Dog Boo came into her own during the search of a shop. The illegal contraband was hidden inside the empty casing of a printer, placed on a shelf in the storeroom of the shop. But Boo still sniffed out the secreted illicit cigarettes and vaping products.

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A larger haul of illegal cigarettes was found in the property after Trading Standards obtained a Search Warrant, issued by a court to authorise the search of the premises.

This was Aberdeenshire's efforts as part of Operation CeCe, which is part-funded by HMRC, with the aim of tackling the supply of illegal tobacco and cigarettes.

David MacKenzie, Chair of the Society of Chief Officers of Trading Standards in Scotland, said: "This is an outstanding result for Aberdeenshire Trading Standards. Removing illegal tobacco from the marketplace protects consumers and legitimate businesses. They are playing their part in Operation CeCe Scotland, a joint operation between Trading Standards Services and HMRC, to combat illicit tobacco supplies. In addition, the intelligence gathered as a result will add to the national picture informing the work of other Trading Standards Services and HMRC."

Investigations are continuing with a view to reporting those involved to the Procurator Fiscal.

Gordon Buchanan, Aberdeenshire Council's Protective services Manager said: "This is a great result. It is one of the largest seizures of illicit tobacco and tobacco products that we have had in Aberdeenshire to date, and the staff and Search Dog Boo must be praised for the careful planning and execution of the operation. Illegal tobacco is not a victimless crime, it is serious and organised crime which significantly harms our communities. This latest enforcement action demonstrates to local communities that the Council will not allow these criminals to risk the safety of the residents of Aberdeenshire and the undermining of legitimate local businesses."

Anyone with information about the sale of illicit cigarettes or tobacco can report it to Trading Standards by emailing trading.standards@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

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.

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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.

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>