



From mountain to sea

Doorstep Callers and Scams

Bulletin No. 69

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.

Doorstep Callers

One vulnerable resident of south Aberdeenshire recently reported that he had a workman come to his door to advise the resident that there were trees in the garden which needed urgent work done on them. (This is a classic approach of the rogue trader.)

The resident told the workman that he didn't want any work carried out on the trees. The workman became quite insistent, and at times aggressive, that the work be done. When the resident tried to close the front door, the workman put his foot in the door to prevent this. Figuratively and literally, the resident stood their ground and eventually the workman conceded and left in his van.

Clearly, this was quite an alarming situation for the resident but there are certain things which can be done in these circumstances:

- When talking to an unknown caller at the door, it's perfectly acceptable to speak to them through the door, the letterbox or a small window close to the door if you're uncomfortable about opening the door,
- If you have a video doorbell installed, use that to converse with the caller. You can then remain secure in the house and end the call at the time of your choosing,
- Preparation is key. If you have a Community Alarm, be sure you take the pendant with you when you answer the door,
- Similarly, if you have a mobile phone, take that instead so you don't have to leave the door unattended while you summon help,
- If you live with someone, or there's someone else in the house, try to let them know that there's an unknown caller at the door before you open the door, so that they can come to your assistance if necessary,

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- If the caller becomes persistent or aggressive, as in this case, tell them you'll call for assistance or call the Police - and don't be afraid to do so if the situation warrants it,
- To prevent people from putting their foot in the doorway to prevent you from closing it, consider having a door chain or door bar installed which prevents the door from being pushed open beyond a very limited point. Once fitted, remember to use it,
- An alternative to the above is a door brace which is a bar which slips under the door handle and props the door closed via a pad on the floor behind it,
- If you can, try to note details of the description of the caller and any vehicle they arrived or departed in, then report the incident.

Your local Crime Reduction Officer can offer you advice on any of the items mentioned above. They can be contacted via the non-emergency number of 101.

Scams etc.

One resident of the Marr area recently reported that he had been contacted some time ago on a popular social medium by someone purporting to work for an investment company. This 'investment advisor' told him that if he followed their advice, he could be in profit by £90,000 within a year. And so began a series of payments from the resident to the advisor, consisting of either Google Play or iTunes gifts cards once or twice per month for £200 each time, with the resident providing the advisor with the serial numbers for the gift cards. This continued for over a year. The advisor promised that the profits would be delivered by Fedex once delivery fees had been paid but when the resident became concerned and began asking about his pay-outs, all signs of the investor disappeared from the social medium and he stopped responding to queries.

As astute readers will have already concluded, this was just another investment scam. The advisor was no advisor at all, but just a scammer. The scam bears a number of hallmark red flags of online investment scams:

- Investment advisors seeking new business through social media rather than traditional means (remember, social media are the hunting grounds of scammer looking for unwary victims),
- Promises of outrageous profits (the classic case of something being too good to be true),

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- Investment houses taking payment by way of gift vouchers (no investment house worth its salt would accept anything but cash, either by cheque or direct bank transfer),
- Giving over the serial numbers of gift cards or vouchers but the 'customer' retaining the physical card,
- The customer paying delivery fees for the profits being delivered instead of them being covered by the advisor from the 'huge profits' made,

As always, some points to remember:

- Visa and Google had no part to play in this scam, it was simply the choice of the scammer to use their gift cards as a means of obtaining funds,
- Fedex too had no part in this scam but was named simply to boost the scam's credibility,
- Never accept financial advice from an 'advisor' via social media; it's no different than a stranger knocking at your door and offering the same advice,
- If you are looking for investment advice, do your own research into advisors, ideally one with a UK bricks and mortar address so you have enforceable rights,
- Check the advisor's professional qualifications and ensure they are regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority via the link [here](#),
- If you think you've been the victim of a scam, report the matter immediately to your bank and to Trading Standards, who can advise you of your rights,

Please remember that your due diligence starts before you part with any money; caveat emptor – buyer beware!

Misc.

A message from Police Scotland:

Officers in Aberdeen are asking the public to be vigilant following telephone banking fraud scams.

Recently, an 85-year-old man from the city was the victim of such a scam after fraudsters managed to con £200,000 from him.

He was contacted by a man claiming to be from his bank. The man advised that the victim's bank account was being investigated due to fraudulent activity and asked him to transfer £20,000 to an account provided by the scammer. The

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victim complied and provided vast sums on a near-daily basis. He was also encouraged to set up internet banking.

The victim was then contacted by a woman claiming to be from the Police, working as a part of the investigation. The victim became suspicious and told a family member.

A 59-year-old business owner was defrauded of £210,000 after being informed by scammers that his various bank accounts had been compromised and was instructed to transfer his money to a 'safe account' via internet banking.

He transferred the entire balance of his business and personal accounts into criminal control.

Chief Inspector Darren Bruce said: "The people who carry out these crimes are despicable. They target members of our community and steal their life savings.

"The scammers gained the victims confidence to ensure they parted with large sums of money.

"Criminals pretend to be from a legitimate bank, then contact the victims by telephone to warn of suspicious activity on their accounts. They convince the victim to transfer money to 'safe accounts'. This type of fraud is known as 'Authorised Push Payment'.

"We would like to make the public aware of these calls to ensure that their elderly or vulnerable family members, friends and neighbours are also aware of these types of scams.

"Reputable banks and financial institutions will not ask you for your banking details or password by phone. If in doubt, do not share any personal information or financial details."

The Crime Reduction Team would also like to remind us that they are more than happy to go along and talk to any groups on any part of crime reduction, be it frauds and scams or physical security. They will also stand in business premises and talk to customers attending there, as they have done in the majority of banks in the three local authority areas. Talks can be tailored to the group/audience etc.

Please bear this in mind should we receive requests for talks and or identify an area/group/demographic etc that would benefit from such.

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The Crime Reduction Team can be contacted by e-mail on NorthEastCrimeReduction@scotland.police.uk

A message from John Herriman

A message from John Herriman, CEO of the Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI):

“It’s been good to see the profile of Trading Standards being raised over the past few months, especially in relation to our work protecting the public.

A key area of public concern we’ve all been aware of has been the problems associated with vaping, with an increase in illicit vapes as well as a very concerning rise in young people using them. Even the vaping industry itself is saying it needs bigger fines and more regulation, which is an admission that it cannot act responsibly on its own.

One of the key difficulties is that vapes are good for helping cigarette smokers quit because they carry significantly less health risks. Public perception is therefore that vapes aren’t harmful – but as we all know vaping is not good for you if you’ve never smoked and is also addictive. We’ve therefore been working hard to get messages out about the risks from vaping and have had significant success shaping the national story, which has forced Government to look more closely at the issue. It’s been particularly good to see our Lead Officers in the media talking about the critical role Trading Standards plays in protecting the public, especially young people, from harm.

These developments could not come at a more important time as local authorities set budgets for the new financial year and work out how they can protect their communities. Vaping is just one issue amongst many, not least the cost of living crisis and Trading Standards services are essential when it comes to protecting the public. I’ve had to make this point on a couple of occasions where we’ve been made aware of the risk of reductions in Trading Standards teams due to budget cuts. I’m hoping that with the increased recognition of our work through media coverage that the penny is finally starting to drop that cuts to Trading Standards services increases risks to the public.

As the professional body for Trading Standards this is CTSI’s role – to help make the case for our work. It is also vital we are involved in all discussions about entry routes to and progression in the profession whichever sector members work in. It’s particularly pleasing to see the progress on apprenticeships in Wales and Scotland which we are also supporting.”



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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 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.

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 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>