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Trading Standards Bulletin

Bulletin No. 44

Doorstep Crime/ Cold Calling

In late 2021, a resident in the Buchan area had a cold caller attend at his door offering a free health check on his solar panels, which the resident accepted.

Several days later another representative of the company's arrived and completed the health check. However, whilst she was there the rep managed to persuade the resident to agree a service of his solar panels and have fitted an inverter device at a cost of £1500, which he paid with a debit card. The line the rep used was 'You get your car and your boiler serviced so why not your solar panels'. She also played on the resident's fears of the solar panel company going out of business.

Some time later the resident received an electricity bill which was far greater than he'd expected so he had the solar panels checked once again and found that their efficiency had dropped from around 90% to under 5%. It was also established that the inverter was the cause.

Trading Standards is dealing with the matter but this is an example of unscrupulous traders taking advantage of peoples' interest in renewable and green energy technology.

There are a number of approved schemes in the UK which set standards for installers of renewable technology. One such body is the Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS, <https://mcscertified.com/>) which requires member to be part of a Certification Body which assess the technical competency of the installer and an approved code of practice, which ensures that the traders' business practices exceed those laid down in law.

Another such organisation worth bearing in mind is TrustMark (<https://www.trustmark.org.uk/aboutus>), a not-for-profit social enterprise which operates under agreement from the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Notable consumer codes for the renewables industry are HIES (<https://www.hiesscheme.org.uk/>) and the Renewable Energy Consumer Code (RECC, <https://www.recc.org.uk/>).

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We would recommend that when considering installing, servicing or replacing renewables technology at home that, to avoid problems like the one above, that consumers start with one or more of the schemes mentioned in this article.

Bear in mind too that when a trader cold calls you at home, that you have a 14 day cooling off period in which to change your mind and when paying for goods and services over £100, you may have greater legal protection under Section 75 cover (Consumer Credit Act 1974) using a credit card rather than a debit card.

Scams

Puppy Scams

One resident of north Aberdeenshire recently reported that he had bought a dog via an online classified ads website. The ad and the seller advised the resident that the dog was a greyhound which was about 3 months old. The resident was also told that the dog was house-trained, toilet trained, fully vaccinated and good with children, so he went ahead with the purchase, paying several hundred pounds in cash for the dog.

As time went on it became clear that the dog was none of the things that had been promised. The dog was a destructive, anxious, highly strung animal which became aggressive when scared, so much so that it had to be taken to a rehoming charity who advised the resident that the dog was actually about a year old. During this period, the seller blocked all contact from the resident when a refund as mentioned.

If you are considering getting a dog, please consider the following points amongst many others:

- Please do not buy dogs from classified ads (online or offline) or from social media. These are often the mediums used by illegal puppy farmers or disreputable breeders who will then find it easy to avoid contact if something goes wrong.
- There are many reputable breeders and pet shops in Aberdeenshire and further afield who take the welfare of their dogs seriously. Buying from these types of outlets also provide a bricks and mortar address to refer to in the event of a dispute. It also permits seeing the dogs' mother to check on her welfare and the conditions the puppies were kept in. Pet shops and most breeders (those breeding more than 3 litters per year) must be registered to operate as such with their Local Authority.
- There are also numerous charities in Aberdeenshire who are looking to re-home dogs who have been family pets but are in the charity's care through no fault of their own. These charities will also undertake an

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- assessment of these dogs to give the best match to prospective families and will attend to any medical needs whilst the dogs are in their care.
- Whether pet shops, breeders or charities ask to see the dog's medical history, so that you can have confidence that the dog doesn't suffer from any serious or costly medical conditions or if they do, that you know about these up-front. These documents will include details of vaccinations and medication and the vet's practice which cared for the dog previously.
 - Watch for red flags when dealing with the seller such as not having an address for them, meeting them at a neutral location for handovers, only having a mobile number and the original ad as means of contact; paying in cash rather than by bank transfer and in this particular case when the dog did not have a lead but an old piece of rope as a lead.

Further information can be found at <https://www.saynotopuppydealers.co.uk/> and <https://www.scottishspca.org/advice/domestic/dogs> and Bulletins 31, 33 and 36. Details of registered breeder can be found with the Kennel Club at <https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/>

Misc.

Trading Standards were recently contacted by a resident in south Aberdeenshire who was concerned about her investments in a company called National Provident Investments (NPI), which had gone into liquidation. It turns out that NPI does not actually hold the investments but simply invest the funds through other companies.

However, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) has issued a warning that scammers may try to contact customers of NPI, claiming to be from legitimate companies appointed by the FCA or the appointed liquidator. If you are contacted by someone claiming to be in either of these categories, please do NOT engage with them, simply hang up.

Further information and what to do if you have been contacted can be found at <https://www.fca.org.uk/news/news-stories/consumer-warning-northern-provident-investments> particularly under the 'Protecting yourself' section.

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



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may have rights which Trading Standards can help you with. We can also help you with advice about any article mentioned in these bulletins.

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>