

From mountain to sea

Doorstep Callers and Scams

Bulletin No. 97

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

Pushy Doorstep Caller

Trading Standards have recently received a number of reports from across the Formartine, Buchan and Banff & Buchan areas which appear to be connected by their similarities.

The reports involve a lone, middle aged male who attends people's doors on the pretext of offering residents the chance to upgrade their home insulation or underfloor heating. This male claimed that grants are being offered by the UK Government to homeowners who wished to upgrade and, on more than one occasion, he has name-dropped Sir Keir Starmer. This bears many of the hallmarks/red flags of being a bogus caller scam. These are :

- The male wears an ID badge round his neck which looks to be home-made,
- He does not allow residents to see the ID badge up close,
- He is very pushy and insistent that he needs into the resident's home,
- On more than one occasion he has tried to enter people's homes,
- He injects an element of urgency into the conversation, wishing to 'get things done now',
- He does not disclose which company he is 'working' for,
- He may deliberately target older residents,
- He does not hand out the leaflets he is carrying, claiming he's not allowed to,
- When his offer is declined, this male 'throws a strop' which may be a genuine reaction or simply intended to manipulate and frighten a householder into reconsidering his 'offer',



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As always there are some points to consider when having to deal with callers like this. These are covered extensively in Scams Bulletin number 91, in the first article, which can be accessed [here](#) on the Aberdeenshire Council website. However, in this instance, if this male comes to your door we would definitely recommend reporting the matter to Police Scotland. We would also ask that you let your local Trading Standards office know too.

Scams etc.

A resident of south Aberdeenshire recently received an e-mail from a sender claiming to be Gordon Cole KC (King's Council, a barrister who is considered a senior lawyer and who is appointed as such in the Monarch's name). There is indeed a real Gordon Cole KC.

The e-mail continued in a very pleasant manner, advising the reader that he had been a solicitor and investment adviser to a late relative who left behind a substantial sum of money and property documents. The lucky reader was the intended beneficiary of this estate.

The e-mail continues with a request for the reader's full personal details to progress the matter, along with providing 'Gordon Cole's' personal e-mail address for replying to.

In truth, this e-mail is a phishing scam, undoubtedly perpetrated without the real Gordon Cole KC's consent or knowledge. Some further points to consider:

- The misuse of Gordon Cole's name and position is undoubtedly an attempt to give the scam some shred of authenticity and respectability,
- The promise of 'a substantial sum of money' and 'property documents' is simply bait, to hook the unwary reader,
- The request for the reader's full personal details is the real point of the e-mail, so that the scammer can either sell these details of to another criminal, or use them to commit crimes himself,
- In all likelihood, this scam e-mail would have been sent out to a large number of people at one time (a bulk e-mail),
- A check on the e-mail address verifier [E-mail Hunter](#) shows that the personal e-mail address has the correct format, but E-mail Hunter could not connect to the address's server and declared it unable to receive e-mails, however for this to have been an effective scam it must have once been able to receive e-mails. It had probably been decommissioned by the scammers as they moved onto another scam.

Should you receive a similar e-mail, please consider the following actions:

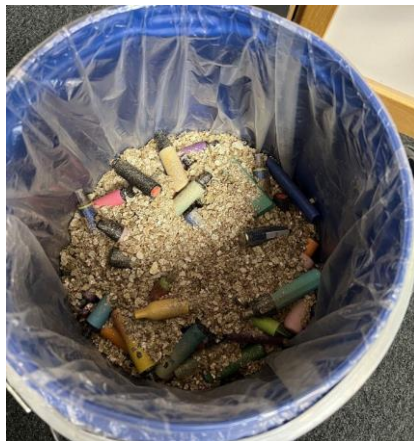
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- Please do not reply to the e-mail address, even to tell them that you know it's a scam as this simply highlights to the scammer that your e-mail address is active and this would likely result in you being targeted by even more scam e-mails,
- Instead, forward the e-mail to the National Cyber Security Centre (<https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/>) at the e-mail address report@phishing.gov.uk so that they can investigate the matter and possibly block the e-mail address,
- As always, please also report the matter to your local Trading Standards office so that we can keep abreast of these matters.

Misc.

New way to recycle vapes at all household recycling centres in Aberdeenshire

A new and safer way to recycle vapes is available at all household recycling centres across Aberdeenshire to minimise the risk of fire.



Aberdeenshire Council's recycling centres now have specialised drums that will be used to safely store vapes or e-cigarettes and layer them with vermiculite. Vermiculite is a mineral that minimizes the risk of fire associated with lithium-ion batteries, effectively safeguarding the materials during storage and transport.

If it is not exposed to leaks, vermiculite is also entirely reusable and makes the collection of vapes much safer, especially now that they are collected separately from Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment containers.

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If the battery inside a vape is easily removable, then that battery alone can and should still be removed and disposed of in battery recycling receptacles. Vapes cannot be safely recycled in kerbside collections. They should never be put in any kerbside collection bins or battery bags due to the risk of contamination and fire.

One recent and local example of a vape fire occurred in September 2023 when a collection of disposable vapes exploded during routine compaction at Westhill recycling centre after being incorrectly placed in a general waste skip.

Binned vapes are part of the fastest growing sources of electrical waste in the UK. The number of disposable vapes being thrown away in the UK has grown across a single year from 1.3 to five million per week, research from Material Focus has shown.

Recycling just ten tonnes of lithium from these products could supply enough material to produce batteries for approximately 1,200 electric cars. Veolia now facilitates the collection and transportation of the vapes to a recycling facility in Portsmouth where around 94% of all materials are recovered from the vapes.

(Jack Stott, Marketing & Communications Officer, Aberdeenshire Council)

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



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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](#).