

From mountain to sea

Doorstep Callers and Scams

Bulletin No. 89

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 received a number of reports from residents in the Inverurie area about a male who has been calling at peoples' doors, causing them some concern.

On some of these occasions the male has stated that he was there to 'read the meter' and on others he has claimed to be working for a broadband company, though on no occasion reported did the male specify which company he worked for.

To bolster his credibility this male was noted to be wearing a hi-viz waistcoat, though it was also noted that he did not have any obvious ID with him, nor did he offer any ID to residents. He was also quite vague about a number of matters but what was clear was that he sought to gain entry to peoples' homes. Thankfully, in all of the reported occasions none of the householders permitted the male access to their home.

Points to consider when dealing with potential bogus callers:

- Fixing 'No Cold Caller' signs at the garden gate and again at the front door can be a good way to deter bogus callers. Trading Standards can supply the stickers but small gate signs can be obtained from Amazon.co.uk for a few pounds each. If a cold caller then ignores them, they may be committing an offence,
- If you get a cold caller at the front door, try to get a discreet look at them from a window adjacent to the door. If you don't like the look of them, don't answer the door,



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- If you choose to answer the door remember to apply the door chain, door bar or door holder (a pedal operated device which fits at the bottom inside of the door and presses a pad down onto the floor), so that the door cannot be easily pushed open from the outside,
- If you don't have any of the above devices fitted to your main door, consider having them fitted. This can be done by a competent DIY-er,
- Smart doorbells can be a good crime deterrent as many record who is at the door; allow the householder to converse with them without having to come to the door and end the conversation at the time of their own choosing,
- If the smart doorbell records callers, please consider 'CCTV in Operation' stickers by the door so that the caller knows they may be recorded. This can also be a good crime deterrent,
- If you do choose to answer the door, ask the caller to show you their ID. If they can't or won't let you see it, be very cautious,
- If they do show you ID, ask them if you can use it to check that they are genuine, if they don't consent, again be very cautious,
- If they do consent, close and lock the door (never leave the door ajar and unattended with a cold caller on the doorstep), then use the phone book, invoices/bills or the internet to obtain a reliable phone number for the caller's employer, call them and confirm the caller is legitimate (by name). Don't use any phone numbers on the ID card as this may be faked. Quickly note down the details of the ID card too,
- If in doubt, keep them out. Until you're happy that the caller is genuine, keep them at the doorstep. If you think after all of the above that they may be genuine, you can permit them access but stay with them while they're in your home and lock the door after they enter and again after they leave, all to prevent intruders,
- If you're in any doubt, decline their request, politely but firmly,
- Keep any paperwork such as flyers that the caller offers you and try to note a description of any vehicle they may be using (so keep a notepad handy),
- If they try to keep you at the door after you've declined their request, tell them you have a pot on the stove which is about to boil over or you have a visitor in the house so you really must go. Close the door, then lock it,
- If they won't let you go, tell them you'll call the Police (so, take your mobile to the door with you, just in case), and if they persist, do just that using 999,

A substantial amount of the risk involved with cold callers can be mitigated through preparation, so:



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- Contact any genuine companies who may send callers to your door and ask them to notify you in writing in advance. You may also be able to agree a password with the company which the caller should provide to you, so you have greater confidence that they're genuine but remember still to be cautious,
- If you can, arrange with a nearby neighbour that if either of you gets a cold caller at the door, the other will come over to stand with them while dealing with the caller. This can be a real confidence booster to people who dislike dealing with cold callers and provide an additional witness if anything happens (while also acting as a deterrent that it actually will)

Remember too to report any such incident to your local Trading Standards office so that Officers can look into the matter.

Scams etc.

Telephone Scam

One businessman resident in the north Formartine area recently reported that he had been called on his mobile by a company offering him advertising space for his business in their rural crime magazine.

The caller was a well-spoken male who advised that the resident's business was very highly thought of by the Department of Trade and that it had been the DoT which had provided the caller with the resident's mobile number. The caller also stated that his magazine worked very closely with Police Scotland and that for a fee of only £300 they could provide the resident with a small advertising space in their magazine.

Suspecting rightly that the caller was a scammer, the resident asked the caller who had given the magazine his contact details. At this the caller became aggressive and abusive, then hung up.

The truth of the matter of course was that it was a scam and had the resident parted with money, in good faith, for an advert in the 'magazine', he would have received nothing for his payment and his cash would have disappeared.

Some points to consider:

- Even if the DoT did work with a rural crime magazine, for anyone there to share the resident's identity with an outside organisation without his consent would be a breach of the Data Protection Act 2018, and therefore a criminal act,
- Likewise with Police Scotland,



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- The DoT and Police Scotland, in truth had no part in this scenario. The scammer simply name-dropped those organisations' names to bolster his credibility with the resident (which failed on this occasion),
- A check on the reverse phone look-up service [Who Called Me](#) showed a number of previous checks on the callers number, which was a mobile number, but there was no history of wrongdoing listed. You can also check a number on this service by noting it down and searching on the website for any known history,
- If you are being pestered by scammers or high pressure sales calls, the simplest short-term tactic just is to hang up then block the caller's number if you can,
- If these calls are a persistent problem, it may be worth speaking to your telephony provider to see if they have a call interception/blocking service (there may be a small charge for this service),
- Further information, including how to block calls on mobile phones and dealing with unwanted phone calls can be found at the [National Cyber Security Centre's website](#),
- Additional information about this subject can also be found on the [Ofcom website](#),
- If you think you may have fallen for a similar scam, please remember to report the matter timeously to your bank or credit card holder to see if any payments can be recovered,

Remember too to report the matter to your local Trading Standards office so that Officers can look into the matter.

Misc.

Illicit tobacco seized from street seller

The Journal of Trading Standards (the magazine of the Chartered Trading Standards Institute) recently featured an article about Moray Trading Standards Officers who just a few weeks ago hit a street seller of illegal tobacco in Elgin with a Fixed Penalty Notice for £1200. The full article can be read [here](#).

Aberdeenshire Trading Standards also seek to take action against the illegal sale of age restricted products such as cigarettes, tobacco, disposable vapes or fireworks, whether these be from shops, on the street or from peoples' homes. If you have information about sales like these, please report the matter in strictest confidence using the contact information provided below.

Scams Talks



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Should you belong to a community group and you would be interested in having a presentation from Trading Standards about scams, please get in touch using either the telephone number 01467 537222 during office hours, or e-mail us at tradingstandards@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 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 the [Consumer Advice Scotland](https://www.consumeradvice.scot.nhs.uk/) 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](https://www.friendsagainstscams.org/) or [Take Five](https://www.takefive.org.uk/) at their website.

Please direct any media queries to news@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or 01467 538222 during office hours.



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All previous Trading Standards bulletins can be found on the Aberdeenshire Council website on the [Trading Standards Scams Bulletin page](#).