

From mountain to sea

Doorstep Callers and Scams

Bulletin No. 98

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

One resident of the Marr area recently had callers at her door who offered to powerwash her roof and driveway. Unfortunately, she accepted their offer and the workmen set to work on both the roof and drive.

After the work was complete, the resident paid the 'workmen' and they went on their way. However, a couple of days later the resident discovered that when it rained, the rain came spilling onto the ground from the guttering. Closer inspection of the gutters revealed that when the workmen had cleaned the roof, they had only cleaned the debris from the roof, which had then blocked the gutters and downpipes, so rainwater had nowhere to go. The workmen hadn't bothered cleaning this debris from the guttering, instead they left it where it had accumulated.

The resident also discovered that the rubbish which had been power washed off of her driveway had been swept up and dumped under her neighbour's hedge, which the neighbour was none too happy about.

Repeated attempts to have the workmen come back to clean the gutters and clear away the rubbish properly went unanswered, so the matter was later reported to Trading Standards.

Further enquiry revealed that the company is known. Their flyers provided in the past have a website address when searched leads to a non-existent webpage, the 'land line' is an 0800 free to call non-geographic UK number and the mobile number is a Vodafone mobile number which is not the mobile number given by the workmen. There is no information about a business address on the flyer, so

From mountain to sea

dissatisfied customers have nowhere to go to make complaints if their phone calls are not answered.

On this occasion, this resident will have to employ someone else to clean up this mess on top of what she originally paid. Unfortunately, this incident concisely highlights the risks of employing cold callers at the door.

Some points to note:

- When dealing with cold callers at the door, you really have no idea who they are or how they operate,
- The safest option by far is to simply tell the caller, “No thanks”,
- If the caller says he can do it ‘cheaper than anyone else’ or similar, this is a red flag that you may be dealing with a scammer,
- Do not accept any flyers or other paperwork the caller gives you and keep them safe. However, make clear that acceptance of these is not a commitment that you will get them to do work,
- Don’t be drawn on discussing prices or money with the caller. If they start talking money, change the subject to the weather, what’s in the news or tell them you’re too busy to deal with their call at the moment,
- If you have to, tell them you have a relative who does ‘that sort of work’ and in this cost of living crisis, you’d prefer to give the work to ‘family’,
- If they become persistent, tell them you have a visitor in the house already and you need to go back inside to see them. This (non-existent) visitor is, in the eyes of this caller, a potential witness to them being at your front door and what they say and do,
- Or, tell them your pot on the stove is going to boil over, so you need to attend to that, then close and lock the front door,
- If the caller won’t leave your door, tell them you’ll call the Police (so keep your mobile phone to hand) and mean it,
- Once you’re safely indoors again, try to write down as much as you can recall of the caller’s description(s), and the vehicles they may be using,
- Report the matter to your local Trading Standards office for them to follow up on.

Scams etc.

One resident of Kincardine recently received a text message from someone claiming to be her daughter. The text sender claimed that she had dropped and broken her normal phone and that ‘she’ had bought a new SIM card, put it in a spare phone and was contacting the resident to ask for her help to pay a couple of bills urgently.



From mountain to sea

Believing the message was genuine and fearing that non-payment would cause her daughter real problems, the resident immediately paid £1600 for the first bill into a European bank account. When the resident saw the size of the second bill, which was even larger, she balked. She then went to speak to her daughter in person about these payments only to find that her daughter had no knowledge of them and denied sending her mother any such text messages.

It was at this point that the resident realised that she had been scammed, so reported the matter to Trading Standards.

In truth, this is a variation on the 'Hi Mum' text scam; only the narrative in the text has changed a little.

If you receive any text messages claiming to be from a family member and you think it might be genuine:

- Consider the nature of the bills or who is to be paid and mentally weigh up if this is consistent with what you know of that family member and their lifestyle, who is to be paid and by how much,
- Try to speak to the genuine family member either in person or by using a contact phone number you already have for them to confirm or refute the content of the text; don't simply reply to the text as you may be replying to scammers,
- If the text sender provides you with bank account details, also consider if these details seem consistent with the family member's lifestyle; do they bank (as in this instance) with a European bank?
- If in any doubt, do not send money,

If you suspect that the text is a scam, please:

- End all contact with the text sender,
- If you can, forward the text to the Spam text number 7726 for telephony providers to examine. They will consider blocking the text sender's number from sending out any further messages,
- Block the text sender's number from your phone,
- Remember to report the matter to your local Trading Standards office for them to provide advice and investigate.

Misc.

AI Cold Calls

One of our colleagues in Trading Standards was at home recently when she received a call on her mobile phone. When she answered she spoke to a man with an indistinct British accent. This male was quite chatty and pleasant. He

From mountain to sea

immediately launched into what sounded like a scripted speech about home energy use and grants for improved home insulation.

The male then began to ask the colleague some fairly straightforward questions about her gender, marital status and age bracket, which the colleague answered immediately and clearly. It was only after a few of these questions, when the caller started to repeat them, that the colleague began to suspect that she wasn't talking to a human being but to an AI (Artificial Intelligence) research programme.

Our research suggests that the use of AI in legitimate and illegitimate cold calling is expanding quickly, with programmes like Air AI and Callify.ai being two of numerous systems already in use. While there are no laws against the use of AI in legitimate marketing calls, this may cause apprehensions in older people who then realise that they're speaking to a robot. More worryingly, scammers are also believed to be using AI in their cold calls too. Trading Standards will monitor this situation closely.

Please remember, whether a caller is human or AI, you are not obliged to speak to them or answer any questions they may try to ask. Just hang up. If you are being pestered by scammers, marketing calls or high pressure sales calls, speak to your telephony provider and ask about their call interception services to intercept these calls. Remember, there may be a small cost for these services.

Counterfeit Vodka

Trading Standards were recently made aware of the production and distribution of counterfeit vodka labelled as Grant's Vodka. This counterfeit vodka may have a strange smell and taste differently from genuine vodka.

Products sampled were found to contain isopropyl which is an industrial solvent (often used in hand sanitisers) and is not intended for human consumption. Consumption of isopropyl can quickly lead to alcohol poisoning and, in severe cases, death. **Please, do not drink it.**

To date, counterfeit vodka has been confirmed in 35cl bottles, in the Glasgow and North Lanarkshire areas. There have been reports of issues with other bottle sizes and in other Local Authority areas but these have not yet been confirmed as counterfeit. Aberdeenshire Trading Standards and Environmental Health Officers will be making relevant checks at retail premises during their inspections.

From mountain to sea

The producer of this counterfeit vodka is still unknown at this time but Local Authorities have typically found the product on sale in small, independent retailers and off-licences.

If you see and 'Glen's Vodka' that has no laser etched 'lot code' applied to the bottle between the rear label and the base of the bottle, do not buy it. Further information on the matter can be found [here](#).

If anyone has any information about the manufacture or sale of counterfeit alcohol, please call the freephone confidential National Food Crime Unit hotline on 0800 028 1180.

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](#) 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.



From mountain to sea

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](#).