



From mountain to sea

Doorstep Callers and Scams

Bulletin No. 91

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 in the Garioch area was recently left shaken and frightened after having two cold callers at her door on the same afternoon. Both were male and both worked for the same double glazing company. In itself, this would not be an issue, but on these occasions both males were very pushy, became quite aggressive and would not take 'no' for an answer from the resident which takes them into the realms of being rogue traders.

Unfortunately, Trading Standards often receive similar calls from residents reporting pushy callers at their door, whether these people are salesmen, company agents or 'tradesmen'.

There are a number of measures which residents can take to deal with doorstep callers like these. One decisive measure is preparation, that this situation may at one time or another happen to almost anyone. So, in preparation for this it may be worth considering the following:

- Consider placing 'No Cold Caller' stickers at the front or main door which callers will likely come to. Also, consider placing 'No Cold Caller' notices on the garden gate or at the end of the driveway. Trading Standards can provide the stickers and the notices are available from reliable websites such as Amazon. For a caller to then ignore these signs may be an offence under Trading Standards regulations,
- If you don't have them installed already, consider installing fish-eye door viewers, a door chain, door bar or a door jammer which allow the resident to see who is at the door before opening same or open the door to a limited degree, but without permitting the caller to easily push the door

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open or put their foot in the doorway. These items can be quickly installed by a competent DIY-er,

- Consider making an arrangement with a close neighbour that if you have a doorstep caller, you can summon the neighbour to stand with you while you deal with the caller. This in itself can act as a deterrent to any misbehaviour and legally your neighbour is another eye-witness to any incidents which might occur,
- If your doorway is prone to a lack of streetlight during the hours of darkness or in winter, consider having a motion activated light installed adjacent to the door, so that at times like these you can see who is calling at the door before you open it,
- If you have the means, consider installing a video doorbell. These items continue to grow in popularity as they permit the resident to answer the door without actually having to go to the door. Most come with a built-in camera and microphone which allows the resident to talk to the caller via a smart phone app. Most also can record footage of the caller at the door so if a problem occurs, at a later date the footage can be used as evidence for any investigation,
- Remember, once the above items have been installed, use them. This may involve changing ingrained habits,
- Remember too, once these items have been installed, keep them in good working order so that they don't fail you when you need them most,
- Consider joining or setting up a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme in your area. The purpose of Neighbourhood Watch is simple in essence, to look out for your neighbours and they look out for you, to everyone's benefit. Further information on how to do either can be found on the [Neighbourhood Watch Scotland website](#).

What to do on the day:

- Remember, you're not obliged to answer the door to an unexpected caller, especially one you don't like the look of,
- If you do answer the door, remain calm and polite so as not to inflame the situation, particularly if the caller is showing signs of aggression,
- Whatever you do, don't let callers like this into your home. Once they get themselves seated it can be much harder to get them to leave, so avoid the situation by keeping them on the doorstep,
- At the doorstep, if the caller becomes persistent, tell them that you already have a caller in your house and that you need to go back inside, to attend to this caller,
- Alternatively, tell them you have a pot boiling on the stove and you don't want it to boil over, so you really must go. In either case, don't wait for their acceptance, simply apologise and close and lock the door,

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- Note details of the caller's description. It may seem counterintuitive but focus on the memorable personal attributes of the caller such as deep voice, accents, tattoos, long hair or notable items of clothing they're wearing,
- Also note details of any vehicle you think they may be using, such as make, model, colour and any details of companies listed on the exterior of the vehicle,
- Accept any flyers or other paperwork which the caller offers you. Keep these safe in case there are issues which come to light in the future,
- Remember to report such incidents to your local Trading Standards office, to add to their intelligence picture or to launch an investigation,
- If the callers were aggressive or threatening, consider reporting the matter to Police Scotland.

Scams etc.

Phone Scam

One resident in the Buchan area has recently been pestered by a large number of telephone calls on his mobile phone from a number of callers, all of whom claim to be from institutions such as Citizens Advice, Debt Advice Scotland (a non-existent organisation) and the Nationwide Building Society (claiming there had been fraudulent activity detected on his account on one occasion and claiming that he'd applied for a loan on another occasion).

The focus of all of the calls was finance. All of the callers had Asian accents and almost all were shown on the Caller ID display as calling from numbers with an '0330' prefix. On other occasions the prefix showed as '0161' which of course is the Manchester area code. Also, on most of these occasions the callers asked the resident to provide personal and banking details 'to pass security' and became quite obnoxious and abusive when the resident refused (rightly) to provide those details.

The resident, correctly believing that the callers were scammers, initially demanded to know where the callers obtained his details, which they all refused to divulge. He later reported the matter to Trading Standards who are still investigating.

Some points to consider:

- Neither Citizens Advice nor the Nationwide Building Society had anything to do with these scams; their good names were misused by the scammers to lend credibility to the deception,

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- The claim that there had been fraudulent activity on the resident's bank account was simply a scare tactic to get him to impart his banking details to that scammer, just as in a 'safe account' scam,
- The claim that the resident had applied for a loan was another deception intended to create an element of doubt in the resident's mind that he may have made such an application. In truth it was simply another attempt to obtain the resident's banking details,
- Checks on the 0330 number revealed that these are in fact non-geographic numbers (operated by telephony companies based in Leeds and Brussels) so it is impossible to know for sure where the caller is actually located,
- All of these numbers were associated with either bank frauds, insurance scams or debt scams, and all had been checked out at least 2000 times each,
- Checks on the 0161 numbers showed that although they used the Manchester STD code, they were in fact VoIP (internet based) numbers and so it was impossible to assess where the callers were actually calling from,
- The 0161 numbers were operated by the same telephony companies and had both been checked out hundreds of times each,
- Given the similarities in the numbers used, the similar aims of the many calls and the Asian accents of all of the callers, both male and female, it's likely that the calls actually originated in the many such call centres in India,
- That being the case, these callers would be outwith the reach of UK legislation and the Telephone Preference Service,
- That being the case, it is likely that the call centre bought the resident's details from thieves who breached the security of a legitimate company's database,
- Rightly discerning that the calls were from organised scammers, the resident's first action was simply to hang up on the callers,
- He thereafter made complaint to his own telephony provider, Vodafone, who suggested that he download the free app called [Truecaller](#) to help block out unwanted callers. This app can be downloaded from the Play Store and the Apple Store (though terms and conditions may apply. Trading Standards are not in a position to endorse this app and similar apps may be available),
- If you feel you may have been the victim of a similar scam or are being pestered by this type of call, remember to report the matter to your local Trading Standards to see how we can help you.

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Misc.

Nothing to report.

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.

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](#).