



From mountain to sea

## Doorstep Callers and Scams Bulletin No. 92

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 elderly, vulnerable resident in the Kincardine and Mearns area recently had a caller put a flyer through her letterbox with an offer to clear her gutters. As she knew the gutters were needing done, the resident called the number on the flyer and the caller attended at her door. She then agreed to the caller doing the work. However, no price was agreed at this time and no estimate or quote was offered by the caller, nor were her cancellation rights provided.

The caller returned to the resident's home over the next two days for around five hours in total and cleared the gutters. He thereafter presented the resident with a very basic invoice for over £4000, insisting that he be paid in cash. Despite the caller being very pushy about payment in cash, the resident advised that she did not have that sort of money in the house so offered him payment by cheque. Initially he rejected a cheque, claiming aggressively that he needed cash to pay for materials for his next job. When the resident explained that was the only way she could pay him, he grudgingly accepted.

Several days later the caller returned to the resident's door and complained that the bank had rejected the cheque. The resident then handed over a new cheque and the caller left, never to be seen again.

Some time later, the resident concluded that she had been overcharged by the caller and reported the matter to Trading Standards.

Some points to consider:

- As we have said in the past, flyers are just another form of cold calling and dealing with cold callers at the door is too risky as you don't know



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who they are or how truthful they are being with you. Our advice remains the same; please do not deal with cold callers at the door,

- If you need work done around the house, speak to friends, family or neighbours to see if they have had similar work done, who did it and how satisfied were they with the final result (if they didn't actually get work done, discount the recommendation),
- Consider using reliable websites such as [Aberdeenshire's Trusted Trader scheme](#) or if you live near to Aberdeen try the [Aberdeen Trusted Trader scheme](#) or [Aberdeen Care and Repair website](#). Please do NOT ask for recommendations on social media and be very wary of using other trader websites as rogue traders have been known to search for new victims on these,
- Try to get at least 3 recommended traders to give you written quotes on company paper for the work to be done. They should also provide you with details of your right to cancel the work. If they don't this may be a red flag, perhaps indicating that you should try someone else. Keep all paperwork safe,
- Use the 14 day cooling off period to consider who you would like to do the work. Don't let the trader persuade you to go ahead immediately. Make your own decision based on the quotes provided, your general impression of the trader and how urgent the work needs to be done,
- Traders who insist on being paid in cash may be another red flag. This may be an indication that their business is working on a 'hand to mouth' existence and if so this may raise the risk of the business not being able to complete the work.
- Such insistence may also be motivated by a wish on the trader's part to avoid paying any taxes due. It may also be that the trader is trying to cover his tracks and distance himself from the work. Agree the method of payment before the work starts and bear in mind the possible need to prove a paper trail of payments,
- Arguments such as this one that the cash was to pay for the next job are doubtful. It only takes a few days for a cheque to clear. If the trader becomes difficult, ask for his bank details to make a direct bank payment (it also provides the consumer with further proof of who the trader is. Be wary if the payment is being made into a personal account, rather than a business account),
- Never get into discussions with a doorstep caller/trader about how much cash you keep at home. You really don't know who they are or if they might try to steal the cash,
- Should a trader complain that the bank didn't honour a cheque, ask for it back before you provide another. If they can't provide it, be wary. They may be holding onto it until you have paid them with another or by



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another means. Always check your account or with the bank to see if the first cheque has been honoured. If it has, and you've been told it wasn't then paid again, this is fraud and a Police matter,

- As always, if you think you've been a victim of a rogue trader, please report it to your local Trading Standards office.

### **Scams etc.**

#### Business e-mail scam

On occasion, Trading Standards will provide businesses with advice about regulations, often to do with fair trading, contracts or weights & measures (or metrology as it's now called).

Businesses too can be the victims of scams. One such scam is an e-mail scam where one business (the target in this case) has a genuine trading relationship with another business. Scammers, who have misappropriated an e-mail address and pretending to be from the other business then e-mail the target business to advise them that their banking arrangements have changed and that any future payments should be made to a new account.

Some time later, another e-mail is received from the 'other business' asking for payments for goods or services which have been provided.

Unwary staff at the target business have accepted the new requests in good faith and have gone on and paid the scammers, sometimes large sums of money, believing that they are paying the genuine company, only to find out their mistake later, by which time the payments is gone.

To avoid such mistakes, staff who have responsibility for making such payments should be mindful of changes or banking arrangements received by e-mail. Where such an e-mail is received, before any payment is made staff should

- Carefully scrutinise the sender's e-mail address and look for small discrepancies, such as a slight mis-spelling in the e-mail address or one or two additional characters. This can often indicate a clumsy attempt to spoof (present a false address as the real one) the genuine e-mail address,
- Hover the computer cursor over the sender's e-mail address to see if a different address pops up. If so, the pop-up address is most likely the sender's genuine e-mail address,
- Rather than simply replying to the e-mail about the new arrangements, staff should phone the other company and speak to someone in person, to confirm the new arrangements. They should not use any contact

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information from the suspect e-mail to do this. Also, by simply hitting the 'reply' button, staff would be replying to the scammer,

- If there is a suspicion that the e-mail is from a scammer, it should be forwarded to the National Cyber Security Centre via the [report@phishing.gov.uk](mailto:report@phishing.gov.uk) e-mail address for NCSC staff to scrutinise and hopefully block,
- Remember too to report the matter to your local Trading Standards office or to Police Scotland via the 101 phone number.

### **Misc.**

In recent weeks Trading Standards and our colleagues in Environmental Health have received a number of reports, particularly from the Garioch and Formartine areas, about adverts on Facebook where 'sellers' often posing as farm shops are offering 'flats' of washed eggs for sale (a flat is a cardboard tray containing 30 eggs).

These adverts also often include offers of bags of potatoes and/or honey for sale (by the litre), all at sale prices due to the seller having more of these goods in stock than they expected.

Potential buyers are usually encouraged to get in touch with the seller via direct messaging to arrange payment. Payments are then often made via an app and can involve substantial sums of money.

Once the payment has been made, the seller disappears from Facebook and does not respond to messages and the buyer is left out of pocket with no goods to show for it. In truth, it has all been a scam.

Some points to consider:

- Facebook took no active part in this scam; it was simply the medium used by the scammers to snare victims,
- According to UK regulations, Grade A eggs (those fit for human consumption) should not be washed before sale,
- Washing eggs removes the protective layer on the outside of the shell, called the cuticle or bloom, and makes the egg more susceptible to air and bacteria entering through the eggshell,
- For more information on safe handling and storage of eggs at home see - <https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/consumers/food-safety/at-home/eggs>
- If you see any posts on Facebook offering washed eggs for sale, please do not respond to them as they may well be scams and you could end up out of pocket,



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- Another red flag may be that the account where the post originated from may have only been set up a few days before the date on the post. If so, the account may have been set up specifically for this purpose,
- Posts are usually made to groups or pages rather than to individuals,
- Instead, please report any such post to your local Trading Standards office and if you can, please do so by e-mail with a hyperlink which leads to the advert,

### **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](mailto: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.



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Please direct any media queries to [news@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto: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](#).