

From mountain to sea

# Doorstep Callers and Scams

## Bulletin No. 88

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**

Nothing to report.

### **Scams etc.**

#### Facebook scam #1

One resident from the Buchan area recently saw an advert on Facebook about how to make substantial amounts of money while he slept. The advert also featured a photograph of the financial journalist, Robert Peston. Out of curiosity, the resident clicked on the link in the advert which took him to an external website.

Once he was on this website, the resident was asked to input his personal details, including his phone number and e-mail address. Thankfully, he did not give away any banking details.

Within a couple of days, the resident started receiving a large number of spam calls every day. Some were from people claiming to be from Universities offering him the chance to sign up to their courses, others were 'advisors' offering to assist the resident in investing in Bitcoin. Very quickly the resident concluded that the advert was a scam and he found the matter was becoming quite stressful, to the point that he had to screen his calls because the spam calls were so numerous. Each time he received one, he blocked the caller from calling again but eventually the resident stopped answering his calls from numbers he didn't recognise. This situation continued for several weeks until the calls eventually started to tail off.

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Some points to consider:

- Facebook took no active part in this scam; it was simply the medium used by the scammers to hook new victims,
- The photograph of Robert Peston would most likely have been used without that person's knowledge or consent. This would have been to give the scam an air of credibility,
- Please be very cautious of any adverts, on Facebook or elsewhere, which promise riches for little or no effort. This is simply wishful thinking,
- Many other celebrities have had their photographs used without their consent for variations on this scam, such as Elon Musk and the Money Saving Expert Martin Lewis. Be particularly suspicious of these adverts as they will almost certainly be a scam,
- Many scammers use social media (not just Facebook) to hunt out new victims. Never click on links to get rich quick schemes on social media as, once again, they will almost certainly be a scam,
- This incident highlights the links between the use of social media by scammers and how it's misused by them to snare new victims into giving out their personal details which are then passed to other scammers who in turn pester the victim incessantly for weeks, all looking to scam them further,
- Remember, if it looks too good to be true, it probably is.

### Facebook scam #2

Staying with Facebook, another resident in the Formartine area was browsing on Facebook when she saw an advert for Victoria's Secret Body Spray packs. The price being quoted in the advert was well below the normal range of retail prices for this product so she decided to place an order.

This resident then clicked on a link in the advert and was taken to a website for a company which was based in China. She then placed an order for a pack and used her bank card to pay for the transaction.

Five weeks later the resident's order still had not been delivered to her, so she e-mailed the company concerned. They replied by saying that the order had been delivered, which was not the case. The resident waited another two weeks before reporting the matter to Trading Standards as the order had still not been delivered, a total of almost 8 weeks later. To date, it still hasn't been delivered.

Some points to consider:

- Again, Facebook took no active part in this scam, it was simply the medium used by the scammers to snare new victims,



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- Victoria's Secret is a reputable company which took no part at all in this matter,
- The reason that the price of the pack which the resident paid for was so cheap was, in all likelihood, that it was counterfeit, made by organised criminals – if it existed at all,
- As with any other counterfeited good, criminals will use the cheapest ingredients to try to replicate a genuine article. This may well include substances which have undergone no safety testing at all so any impact on a person's health may be unknown,
- Although China is the manufacturing hub for most of the world, studies over the last 10 years imply that China is also a major source of counterfeit goods,
- Remember too that when making payments to companies abroad that these companies may well be beyond the reach of UK civil and criminal law and in China that is almost certainly the case,
- Despite numerous requests from the resident, this company refused to provide any refunds to her, as is usually the case with counterfeiters,
- In this instance the resident was able to get a refund from her bank via [the Chargeback scheme](#),

If you feel that you've fallen victim to a scam similar to this one, please contact your local Trading Standards office for advice. Contact details are at the bottom of this bulletin.

### Phone scam

One resident in the Deeside area recently received a phone call at home from a man claiming to be from a well-known and legitimate insurer of domestic appliances.

This caller was well-spoken with an English accent and he claimed that the resident had two appliance policies which were coming up for renewal. As it happens the resident does actually have appliance insurance with this company, which she pays monthly.

The caller advised the resident that as she was a pensioner, he could offer her cover for less than half of her current monthly premium. All she had to do was confirm her bank details with him. The resident rightly refused to divulge her bank details over the phone and the caller became quite aggressive. The resident pointed out that if the caller really was from the insurance company he should already have her details. When he continued to be aggressive the caller simply hung up.

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In truth, this was a scam although it was of some concern that the caller knew that the resident's policy was actually due for renewal and that she was a pensioner.

Some points to consider:

- Always be suspicious of any cold caller who phones up to discuss your financial information. Do not simply start discussing the policy and providing your finances,
- Try to confirm whether the caller is genuine or not. Don't be afraid to ask them to confirm things like the policy number, policy holder's name, which item(s) are covered, what the current premium is and when the policy is due for renewal. Ask for specifics and don't be put off by the caller trying to flannel you with distractions or failing to answer your questions. Press them for answers,
- It would appear that this caller knew some personal details of the resident's, such as her age, that she had a policy with this company and that it was coming up for renewal. This was possibly due to a data breach involving her insurance company,
- In all likelihood, this caller wanted the resident's bank details to access her bank account for his own purposes, most likely to steal from the account by trying to set up automated payments from it,
- Becoming aggressive with a cautious customer on the phone is not how a professional person would normally act and should be a red flag that you may be dealing with a scammer, particularly if they try to bully this information out of you
- In these circumstances please don't reply on Caller ID on your phone to confirm who is calling you. Many scammers use computers to spoof their real number and make Caller ID show the real number up as another number,
- If in any doubt, simply hang up and use the 1471 service to note the caller's number,
- If you can, block the caller's number and if you do have a policy with the company named by the caller, call that company and report the incident to them,

Remember too to report the matter to your local Trading Standards office for their information.

### **Misc.**

Nothing to report.

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### **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.

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](#).