



From mountain to sea

Trading Standards Scams Bulletin No. 145

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 resident in the Formartine area recently had a group of men come to her door and claim that they worked for a company which cleaned roofs and these men offered to powerwash her roof too. This was despite the resident displaying a 'No Cold Callers' notice. During the course of the conversation, the men claimed that the resident's neighbour was also having their roof cleaned and that was the reason they were in the area. Knowing that her own roof had a build-up of moss and debris and hearing that the neighbour was getting their roof cleaned, the resident then decided to have her roof done too.

The men started the work immediately but a short time later they advised that the work on one side of the roof was complete and they would like the agreed payment, there and then, of almost £1000 in cash. The resident believed that she was getting her whole roof cleaned for this sum but later had to offer a further £100 in cash to get the other side of the roof cleaned too, which was then done.

During this period, the resident was instructed to stay inside as the men said they would be using chemicals to clean the roof. However, she also noted that the men used no safety equipment to do this.

Once the work was done, the resident was asked to make payment in cash in full but advised that she did not keep that sort of money in the house. The men firstly asked if she could get cash from the neighbour to pay but eventually settled for the resident making out a couple of cheques to personal bank accounts rather than a business account. The men then left.



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Later, the resident learned that the neighbours was not getting their roof cleaned and began to suspect that she had been the victim of a scam. She also began to wonder if she was told to stay indoors simply because the men were simply spraying water on the roof, or they did not want her to see the standard of work before they got paid.

As a result, the matter was reported to Aberdeenshire Trading Standards and our enquiries are ongoing. Thankfully there was no damage done to the roof.

Regular readers will recognise that ignoring No Cold Callers signs; claiming that neighbours are getting work done too; the cost of a job increasing once it has started; insisting on immediate payment and in cash and not using the proper safety equipment are all red flags that a cold caller is very likely a rogue trader and a scammer.

Our advice on how to handle a situation like this remains the same:

- Never entertain any cold caller at the door, no matter who they say they are, how good a job they can do or what the cost will be. You don't know them, how truthful they're being or how honest and skilled they are,
- The best response is to remain firm but polite, "Thanks but no thanks", step back inside and close and lock the door,
- Don't get drawn into discussing money with these people. If they start to speak about money, then change the subject immediately to something else, anything else,
- If they claim they can do the job 'cheaper than anyone else', this is a real red flag that they are a rogue trader. They will either take your money and head for the hills, or worse, will come back and make a complete mess of the work, which will subsequently require you to get a genuine tradesman to fix the problem they created, so you end up paying twice,
- Cut out the middle man and be pro-active. If you think your roof needs work, speak to friends, family or neighbours yourself to see if they've had similar work done, who did it and were they happy with the end result. Confirm too that the work was actually done,
- Contact those tradesmen and arrange to get estimates from them in writing on headed paper, along with your cancellation rights,
- Alternatively, consider using the [Aberdeenshire Trusted Trader](#) scheme, or the [Aberdeen Trusted Trader](#), [Moray Trusted Trader](#) or [Angus Trusted Trader](#) schemes if you live close enough to those areas,
- Finally, as always, please report any incidents of cold callers at the doorstep to your local Trading Standards office.

Scams etc.

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Facebook scam

One resident of the Banff & Buchan area recently reported to Trading Standards that he had seen a shed being advertised on Facebook Marketplace for sale. As the shed was reasonably priced, a quality brand and seemed to be what the resident was looking for, he contacted the seller by clicking on the advert. This took the resident through to the seller via WhatsApp and using that platform he expressed his interest in the shed and paid a deposit of £100 for it by direct bank transfer. Then he waited...and waited.

One month and one e-mail later, there was no sign of the shed and no reply to the resident's e-mail asking where it was, so he reported the matter to Trading Standards. Our enquiries suggest that indeed the advert was a scam. The seller has disappeared from Facebook, along with the resident's money.

Some points to note:

- Neither Facebook nor WhatsApp took an active part in this scam. Their platforms were simply the means by which it was carried out,
- That said, both social media are well known for scammers to frequent, looking for victims to cheat, particularly Facebook, as it is the most popular social medium in the world,
- Remember, whenever you buy something through social media, whether it is a shed costing £100 or a car costing several £1000's, when you part with money, it is an act of trust that the seller is who they appear to be, that the item for sale is what it appears. Very often, according to the number of reports we receive, this trust is misplaced and gets badly abused. Some 'sellers' are simply serial scammers,
- There may have been no physical shed to sell. The photos in the advert may have been lifted from another source and used to perpetrate the scam,
- Keep copies of e-mails, photos etc between buyer and seller and take screen snips of any conversations. Keep these safe until the item has been received and you're happy with it,
- If you think that you've been the victim of a scam on social media and you've paid the scammer directly, try to report the issue as soon as possible to your bank. Pass the saved information onto your bank too and initiate a Chargeback for your bank to claw the money back from the seller's bank account. There is a 120 day time limit of this process, starting on the date of the transaction or the expected date of delivery but you should try to resolve the problem with the seller if you can, before you make the Chargeback claim,



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- Remember, PayPal is not generally covered by Chargeback but it has its own dispute resolution process and may be a safer means to make payment than a direct payment between bank accounts,
- Chargeback can also apply where there is non-delivery of an item, where the seller goes bust or if the item is faulty, misrepresented or is a counterfeit,
- There is no upper limit on a Chargeback claim,
- You can read more information about Chargeback on Martin Lewis, the Money Saving Expert's website [here](#),
- If you paid by credit card and the amount was over £100 you may also be able to claim a refund under s75 of the Consumer Credit Act 1974,
- As always, if you think you've been the victim of a scam on social media, please report the matter to your local Trading Standards office, to make them aware, to offer advice and to forewarn other people.

Misc.

Unsolicited packages

One resident in the Banff & Buchan area recently contacted Trading Standards as he had received a package through the post which he had no recollection of ordering from a company which he had no recollection of contacting. The resident was looking for advice on what to do about the matter.

The way the law stands, it is fairly simple; if you receive unsolicited goods that you did not order or agree to acquire you do not have to pay for those goods, return them or contact the seller.

Indications from consumer reviews suggest that the company concerned may deliberately target older or vulnerable residents with these packages but so far no request for payment of the package has been received by the resident.

In the past, Trading Standards have received reports of similar incidents, called brushing scams, where the aim of the scammer was to send random consumers packages containing items which then were the subject of glowing, but fictitious, reviews on certain popular sales websites where the seller then claimed the sale was verified but was in fact as fictitious as the review.

If you receive any unsolicited packages through the Royal Mail, we would be grateful if you would report the matter to your local Trading Standards service.

Stop Press



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On 15th October the annual sales period for fireworks started once again. This period runs until 10th November, as it does every year and, as every year, during this period Aberdeenshire Trading Standards will be attending at retailers who sell fireworks and conducting Test Purchase Operations to try to ensure that these fireworks are only being sold to people who are 16 or older for sparklers (classed as F1 fireworks) or 18 or older for F2 or F3 fireworks.

- F1 fireworks present a very low hazard and are intended for use in confined areas, including fireworks that are intended for use inside domestic buildings. They have a negligible noise level,
- F2 fireworks present a low hazard and are intended for outdoor use in confined areas. They have a negligible noise level,
- F3 fireworks present a medium hazard and are intended for outdoor use in large open areas. They have a noise level that is not harmful to human health,
- F4 fireworks present a high hazard and are intended for use only by persons with specialist knowledge. They have a noise level that is not harmful to human health. They are only stocked by specialist fireworks suppliers.

Only fireworks that comply with current UK safety standards and which carry the CE and/or UKCA mark and are correctly labelled in English with details of the manufacturer and importer can legally be supplied to consumers.

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



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For non-urgent Trading Standards enquiries in Aberdeenshire, please contact Consumer Advice Scotland at <https://consumeradvice.scot/contact/> or call them on 0808 164 6000.

For urgent Trading Standards matters or doorstep crime matters, contact Aberdeenshire Council's Trading Standards at 01467 537222 or via tradingstandards@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

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](#).

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