

From mountain to sea

Trading Standards Scams Bulletin No. 134

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.

E-mail scam

In Bulletin no. 129 we covered a situation where a resident in the Deeside area e-mailed a relative to wish him a happy birthday then soon afterwards she received a reply from that e-mail address from someone impersonating her relative, asking the resident to purchase a gift voucher for a seriously ill girl.

In that instance the scammer used an unused e-mail address whose password they were able to crack.

Trading Standards have recently received a similar report from a resident in the Garioch area who was e-mailed by 'an old colleague' who claimed to be catching up with them after a period of no contact. The first e-mail asked if the resident had time to chat over e-mail. He replied that he did.

A short time later, the resident received another e-mail. In summary, this e-mail asked the resident if he could help get a gift card for a friend's daughter, for her birthday, as she had been cancer free for a year. The 'old colleague' claimed to have laryngitis and had tried unsuccessfully to purchase a gift card, so contacted the resident and asked him to do so, with the promise of being re-imbursed afterwards. The 'old colleague' asked the resident to buy the gift voucher from either Tesco or Amazon, that it be for £100 and to send it on to the friend's

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daughter directly with an e-mail address which they provided. The 'old colleague' also asked to be advised as soon as it had been done.

The resident became a little suspicious of the e-mails due to their impersonal nature, so called his 'old colleague' on the phone to query matters with her. She was able to confirm that she had sent no e-mails, that it was a scam and the e-mail sender was a scammer. She also advised that her e-mail address had been hacked, her contacts list accessed and other people on that list had been e-mailed with similar messages to our residents but some had alerted the real old colleague of this.

Some points to consider:

- Tesco and Amazon took no part in this scam. Their vouchers were simply the preferred choice of the scammer,
- The initial e-mail from the 'old colleague' (in truth, a scammer) was very short and direct, no doubt to save the scammer time but long enough to see if the e-mail got a reaction or not. If not, the scammer would simply try another name on the hacked contact list,
- The story about the friend's daughter being cancer free was a fiction, used to try to manipulate the resident into complying with the request,
- The claim of suffering from laryngitis would no doubt be a false claim, solely to deter the resident from asking to call the 'old colleague' to speak about the request,
- No doubt if the resident had agreed to buy a £100 voucher, the scammer may have then tried to increase the amount,
- The request to advise the 'old colleague' as soon as the voucher had been bought, and the request to e-mail it directly to the daughter are likely tactics intended simply to speed up the process of getting the voucher to the scammer, who would then spend it as quickly as possible and before the resident could have second thoughts and change his mind.

Actions to take:

- Should you receive an e-mail similar to that described above, please treat it with caution as it may be a variation of this scam,
- Bear in mind that if you reply to this e-mail, you may be replying to a scammer,
- To help determine if the e-mail might be genuine or not, try to 'reminisce' with the sender, discuss situations or facts the genuine sender would know; try to elicit details. A genuine sender will probably be able to provide some detail; a scammer will waffle, avoid or ignore the question,
- As with this resident, you could ask to call the 'sender', to discuss the request. In all likelihood a genuine sender will provide a contact number



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without too much fuss, whereas a scammer will make excuses as to why they can't do that,

- If either the e-mail sender can't accurately reminisce or won't provide a contact number, it is likely that you're dealing with a scammer, so end all contact with them immediately,
- If they do provide a phone number, if you can, check it with any number you might already hold for that person,
- If you do decide to call to verify the matter, call the old number first as you already know that one was genuine. Ask to speak to the person who sent the e-mail to verify it,
- If you call the newly provided number, be prepared to end that call quickly if the situation becomes difficult. If in doubt at all, just don't call,
- If you think any e-mail address you use or might have used in the past has been hacked, you can check on the free [Have I Been Pwned website](#),
- If you find your e-mail address on that website, try to log into that e-mail account and try to change the password to a new strong password (8-12 characters, including one lower case, one capital letter, one number and one special character) or 3 random words, to lock the hacker out,
- Please also remember to report incidents like this to your local Trading Standards office, so we can warn other people about the scam.

Misc.

In these bulletins, we frequently refer to data breaches and the misappropriation of people's personal information by illegal means, leading to those people being targeted by scammers and other forms of criminals looking to cheat those people out of their money.

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) recently featured an article which demonstrated the lengths to which some criminals will go to, to access people's data for selling on to other criminals. This article relates to two men seeking employment solely with the intention of stealing data from garages across the whole of the UK. The article is quite an insight into the world of data thieves but is quite worrying at the same time.

The full article can be accessed by clicking [here](#).

Stop Press

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Beware of Bogus Businesses

Minimise your risk - [approvedtrader.scot](https://www.approvedtrader.scot)

- Lists businesses from all official Council schemes
- All members are vetted by Trading Standards
- Everyone must trade fairly and are monitored

Help stop doorstep crime and rogue traders

Scotland Trusted Trader

Supported by **SCOTSS**
Trading Standards



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 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



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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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