

From mountain to sea

Trading Standards Bulletin

Bulletin No. 52

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.

Doorstep Crime/ Cold Calling

Nothing to report.

Scams etc.

One resident of Garioch recently received an alarming and disturbing e-mail from a scammer. In the opening line of the e-mail the scammer correctly identifies the resident's name and home address then (falsely) alleges that the resident had been watching pornography on the internet. He (and it almost certainly is a male scammer) also states he had been able to gain access to the resident's device via the porn websites and had uploaded a Trojan horse onto this device and stole all of the photos, contact details and social media information kept there, as well as making a split-screen video of the porn being shown and the resident apparently watching same.

The scammer then went on to make a 'suggestion' that to make the problem disappear; the resident should pay the equivalent of £1000 in Bitcoin to the scammer's Bitcoin wallet. If not, the scammer threatened to share the split-screen video with the resident's contacts before it was posted onto the internet.

The scammer also stated that the e-mail address he used to send his message was automatically generated by his computer and that as his Bitcoin wallet was online, it could not be located (these last two points are probably the only truthful things the scammer had said).

The tone of the e-mail was that every aspect of the scam had been carefully planned and the resident had no other choice than to pay up or face ruination. However, this is nonsense; this was a scam (albeit a carefully thought out one) and, as so many are, had been sent out to many people simultaneously (similar to the Amazon phone scam) hoping to force a small percentage who do watch

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pornography to respond, believing they had been caught or alarming innocent victims to pay to avoid a scandal. Steps to take are:

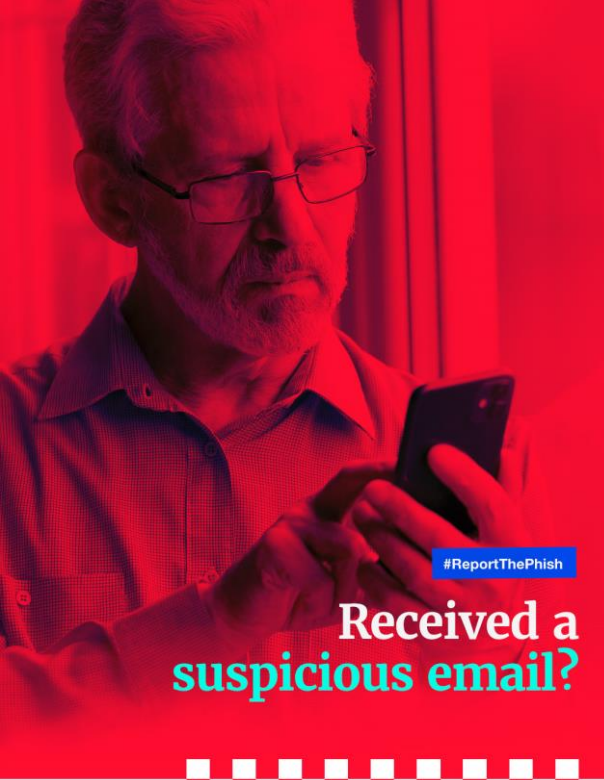
- DO NOT pay the sum demanded
- This is a serious crime, called attempted extortion, and should be reported to Police Scotland immediately by making a formal complaint, to allow them to investigate
- Forward the e-mail to report@phishing.gov.uk where the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) will investigate it. Further information about the NCSC can be found at [NCSC](#)
- The basis of this crime probably stems from a data breach somewhere, where one scammer obtained the resident's details by deception and used them, or sold them to be used, along with many other people's details to target them all at the same time
- Whichever device you use to access the internet, make sure that it is an automatic function in Settings that the device updates its security suite to combat viruses, ransomware, Trojan horses etc.
- Consider switching on your device's browser's function to generate and remember strong passwords which will be harder to guess (this is a free service) or use a password manager which does the hard work of storing passwords for you. Further information and examples of password managers can be found [here](#) but be aware there may be a small cost involved and some services are better than others
- Familiarise yourself with your browser's security settings to minimise data theft. Each browser is slightly different but, for instance, Google Chrome's can be accessed by clicking on the three perpendicular dots in the top right corner of a browser page, clicking 'Settings' from the drop down box and selecting the Privacy and Security button on the left hand column, then work your way through each topic, choosing what is right for you and if in doubt sticking to the 'recommended' settings. If you're not sure, ask someone you trust who is tech-savvy for their help, such as the Which Computing Helpdesk [here](#)
- An alternative to the above would be to visit the website of your security suite provider (such as Norton, McAfee etc.) to view their advice
- Consider the use of websites such as Have I Been Pwned (pronounced poned) (<https://haveibeenpwned.com/>) to check if your e-mail has been subject of a data breach and follow the steps there to recover you data and possibly change the password for that e-mail address. Pwned is term given to a situation where someone's account (e-mail, online etc.) has been compromised due to a data breach.

Data security is a serious matter these days and starts with shredding or burning confidential documents such as credit card or bank statements up to the



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precautions described above but if unsure, seek help from a trusted and knowledgeable friend or relative.



#ReportThePhish

Received a suspicious email?

If you have received an email which you're not quite sure about, forward it to:
report@phishing.gov.uk

 POLICE SCOTLAND  NPCC  Cyber Aware  DO NOT FEED THE PHISH

Misc.

One resident of the Garioch area was recently caught out when she went online to order a new driving licence. She performed a browser search and thought that she had the correct website, DVLA, for doing so, so followed the process and paid the fee of £115 for the application. It was only later when she tried to go back online to check her application that she discovered that it was a private company's website she had used.

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A different resident in the east Marr area also went online to renew his driving licence and was charged £80 to do so by a separate website from the one above. It was only afterwards that he discovered that the website he'd used was a private business website. In both cases these residents thought they were dealing with the DVLA website.

Please remember when making any enquiries with DVLA or applying for a driving licence, the only website you need is the UK Government website www.gov.uk where the standard cost is only £34 for a provisional licence. For replacing a licence it's only £20 and renewing a licence costs only £14, or, if you're over 70 years of age, it's free - a fraction of the cost these private companies charge for the same service.

Conclusion

Please note that the advice given in these bulletins has been deliberately kept simple, so that if you are faced with a scenario such as the ones discussed here where fear, panic and alarm are often tools used deliberately by scammers, you will know what to do at that time. Remember, after the initial panic is over, you may have rights which Trading Standards can help you with. We can also help you with advice about any article mentioned in these bulletins.

If you have been the victim of a Doorstep Crime or an attempted crime, whether Bogus Caller or Rogue Trader, please report the matter to Consumer Advice Scotland so that Trading Standards can build a detailed, ongoing picture of the activities of these scammers throughout 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 urgent Trading Standards matters, contact Aberdeenshire Council's Trading Standards at 01467 537222. For non-urgent enquiries, please contact Consumer Advice Scotland at <https://www.consumeradvice.scot/> or on 0808 164 6000.

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 Friends Against Scams at <https://www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk/> or Take Five at <https://takefive-stopfraud.org.uk/>

Please direct any media queries to news@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or 01467 538222 during office hours.

All previous Trading Standards bulletins can be found at:
<http://publications.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/dataset/trading-standards-crime-and-scams-bulletin>