



From mountain to sea

Trading Standards Bulletin

Bulletin No. 54

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.

Bogus Callers

There have been a small number of reports recently, most notably in the Buchan area, of residents getting telephone calls from people claiming to be working for the Council. These callers claim work with the 'Housing Disrepair teams' and ask about any problems with things like damp, heating etc. Worryingly, they also call the residents by name, so clearly know their target's name and phone numbers.

The truth of the matter is that these callers do not work for any Council; they are scammers, but one thing which appears to stop them in their tracks and cause them to hang up immediately is when the resident asks which Local Authority they are calling from. However, these callers have also shown themselves to be very persistent, sometimes calling residents many times.

In the short term, it may suffice to ask the caller which Council they are calling from and refraining from giving any personal details, but for the longer term another solution is required. As previously mentioned, call blocking devices are highly effective at weeding out scam calls and high pressure sales calls. Two of the best known companies which produce call blocking devices are [trueCall](#) and [CPR Call Blocker](#). These companies are confident that they can weed out the vast majority of these calls and give residents peace - and peace of mind - from these types of persistent calls and would be well worth considering if you are being pestered by these types of bogus calls. These devices are also compatible with the rollover to digital phone lines.

Bear in mind too that there are other companies which produce other call blocking devices and most telephony providers also have a call blocking/

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intercepting services to tackle these calls and that these should be considered too before making any purchases.

Rogue Trader

One resident of the Marr area recently became aware that his roof needed some work done so went online to look for a roofer to do the work. He then contacted a roofer he found there and arrangements were made for the roof to be viewed, then work to be done as a matter of some urgency. The roofer gave a verbal quote of just under £3000 for this. He started work a few days later but within a short time the roofer advised the resident that the problem was worse than anticipated, that the roof was rotten in large part and would need to be almost entirely replaced. The resident agreed to this and paid another £10k by bank transfer to the roofer for the work to be done.

Once the work was done and the roofer had gone, the resident examined the work and became very unhappy with what he found, so he sought the view of another roofing expert. This expert advised that the standard of workmanship was very poor, some of the work was unnecessary and that the resident had been charged far in excess of what the cost reasonably should have been.

Unfortunately, this is a recurring theme in our work so it's worth re-emphasising the following points:

- Please do not go looking for traders online unless it is on reliable sites such as the [Federation of Master Builders](#), [Checkatrade](#), [Trustatrader](#) or [Trustedtrader](#) or similar. Rogue traders often use websites and web pages to advertise and if they can cheat people out of thousands of pounds they will not think twice about filling their pages with lies to lure in the unwary
- Also consider seeking recommendations from friends, relatives or neighbours about genuine traders they have been happy with. If you do contact these traders, ask about previous projects they have worked on, go and view these projects and speak to the resident about how the work went
- Once you have settled on the work to be done, obtain quotes (as opposed to verbal estimates, which is different) from at least 3 traders and compare what they say needs to be done, how long it will take and how much it will cost BEFORE you make any final decisions
- Before any agreements are made, each of the 3 traders should provide you with a quote (in durable form, i.e., written or in an e-mail, which is clear, understandable and legible) for the work. This quote should not be a hand-written note but a formal document, ideally on the trader's headed

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paper, and should include the trader's name, business address and phone number

- A complaints address if it differs from the business address above
- A total for the goods and services being provided (including any taxes such as VAT) or how the total was arrived at
- Information about any additional delivery charges
- How long the work is expected to take (which is the expected length of the contract you are entering into), if and how the contract can be extended by either party (consumer or trader) or how either party can end the contract
- Remember too that any agreement entered into at the consumer's home provides that consumer with a 14 day cooling off period where a consumer can change their mind without penalty and have any deposit refunded in full
- Also, during this 14 day period, no work should start unless clearly requested in 'durable form' (writing or e-mail etc.) by the consumer. This is called a waiver
- The trader should also provide the consumer with either regular invoices if the job is a large one, but in any case a final invoice at the conclusion of the work regardless of the size of job. This, like the original quote, should be in durable form, ideally on headed paper and with a breakdown of costs
- When it comes to all paperwork, be it the quote, any invoices or guarantees about the work done or any payments made to the trader (avoid cash payments if at all possible), keep these documents safe, in case a dispute arises later, as these could prove to be valuable evidence

Unfortunately, too often people are in so much of a rush to get work done that they don't stop to think things through and end up being saddled with a cowboy, as was the case here.

Misc.

As with other parts of the country, Aberdeenshire has its own problems with individuals who sell illegal cigarettes from shops, licensed premises or on the street.

These types of cigarette fall into two broad categories. These are:

- illicit cigarettes; made abroad by genuine manufacturers which are smuggled into the UK without taxes or duty being paid. This can include cigarettes which were never intended for sale in the UK and are

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sometimes called 'cheap whites', or brands which are sold both in the UK and abroad. These can often be identified easily as they are not packaged in the drab olive coloured packaging; may have foreign text on the exterior and may not show the 'UK Duty Paid' banner on the rear of the pack.

- Counterfeit cigarettes; which are manufactured abroad by organised criminal gangs and smuggled into the UK. These are often made in unhygienic circumstances using the cheapest of tobacco which is often adulterated by any materials to hand, such as asbestos, arsenic, rat poison and human feces – quite literally the sweepings off of the floor. Given that tobacco is already known to be harmful to health, these additional materials raise the risks massively.

Both of these types of cigarettes are sold at about half of the standard retail prices which encourages younger people and those on a lower income to buy them and may put their health at additional risk. The people who sell these cigarettes don't care about people's health and are only interested in making money. These prices also put legitimate retailers at a disadvantage as they can find it impossible to compete with illegal cigarette prices.

In addition to the above, illicit and counterfeit cigarettes cost HM Treasury around £2 billion per year, money which could go to fund schools or hospitals.

Also, counterfeit cigarettes have been shown to generate funds for criminal gangs involved in drugs, human trafficking, fraud and money laundering.

If you know of any illegal cigarettes sales in Aberdeenshire, please report it to Trading Standards (see below for details).



Conclusion

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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 non-urgent Trading Standards enquiries in Aberdeenshire, please contact Consumer Advice Scotland at <https://www.consumeradvice.scot/> or 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

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>