



From mountain to sea

Trading Standards Bulletin

Bulletin No. 61

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

Trading Standards have recently received reports of heavy labouring companies going door-to-door in south Aberdeenshire promoting their services and availability by putting flyers through letterboxes.

We would recommend caution when considering using such companies as we have found some of them are not listed on Companies House, which is a branch of the UK Government tasked with maintaining a register of companies operating in the UK. Also, a number of the photographs used on the companies' websites and Facebook pages, apparently of some of their completed projects, have been clearly lifted from the internet as they show street and phone numbering systems which are used in north America and not the UK. Other photos are of poor quality and detail is lacking. Finally, there is no indication on the websites of a physical address for these companies and phone numbers are either mobiles or Freephone 0800 numbers. Taken together, this all puts a dent in the credibility of these companies and the quality of the work they claim as their own.

In truth, these types of flyers are just another form of cold calling and should be treated as such. Should you be considering getting work done in your garden, please do your own due diligence and remember the following points:

- Speak to friends, family and neighbours who have had similar work done and ask them if they could recommend traders who did the work for them
- Use reputable sources such as [TrustATrader](#), [Trustedtrader.scot](#), [Checkatrade](#) or [Aberdeen Care and Repair](#) (scroll down to the Trusted Trader section for a link to the list) to create a short list of companies to deal with (click on the blue links to go to their website)
- Contact at least 3 traders and ask them to provide a written quote for the work you'd like done
- Remember written quotes should be in 'durable form' (in writing or e-mail), should have the company's letterhead, business address, a breakdown of



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the work to be done and an estimate of the total cost of the work to be undertaken and how long this will take

- Also, consider how easy it would be to work with these traders and how receptive they are to your suggestions
- Search websites such as Trustpilot or social media for reports on the quality of work provided by these traders and bear these reports in mind when making a final decision
- Ask the traders to show you a portfolio of their previous projects; many will be only too happy to do so. Select a couple of the closest projects and go round and view the work. If feasible, speak to the customers to see how they got on with their trader
- Remember that if you agree at home to proceed with a trader you will have a legal cooling off period of 14 days in which to change your mind, at no cost to you. Use this period to reflect on whether you want to proceed and to view the trader's public liability insurance and to check any trusted trader scheme they say they're a member of
- Once you've decided to proceed with a particular trader, remember to keep a copy of any paperwork they provide you with such as quotes, invoices and warranties, as should a dispute arise, this paperwork may become crucial evidence to prove some very important points

Should you have any questions about this matter, please feel free to contact Trading Standards using the contact information below to get an answer.

Scams etc.

A resident in south Aberdeenshire recently reported that he had been looking for a roofer on a well-known website to do some repair work on his roof. Very quickly, the resident received a reply from someone claiming to be a roofer. Arrangements were made and the roofer came out and viewed the job. After some discussion a total price of £2400 was agreed upon, which the resident later paid in full by direct transfer to the roofer's bank account. No work was started and the 'roofer' hasn't been seen since.

Unfortunately, the resident has a 'business' name for the roofer but no bricks and mortar address, no land line or mobile number, nor an e-mail address. It may well be that the male concerned is not a roofer at all but is simply a con man.

In addition to the steps suggested above, to reduce the risk of becoming victim of a fairly straightforward scam like this one, please bear in mind:

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- Never go looking for tradesmen on social media. Scam pages are easy to set up there and can look quite convincing
- Try to avoid using the usual websites when looking for tradesmen. The names of these websites are fairly well-known – by scammers too
- Beware tradesmen who claim they were ‘just passing’ and noticed a serious problem with your roof and stopped to let you know. This is a classic tactic of rogue traders a.k.a. scammers. DO NOT give them access to your roof or the problem they reported, which you were previously unaware of, may just appear and it may also look very recent, suspiciously so, even. Thank the good Samaritan politely, send them off their way firmly then get a second and third opinion as per ‘due diligence’ above
- Beware tradesmen who claim that they can do a job ‘cheaper than anyone else’. Often this means they will simply use the cheapest materials (which are unlikely to be as durable as better quality materials), the price might creep up as the work progresses (as the resident is now committed and wants the work finished) or, as in this case, they simply disappear and don’t do any work at all
- Don’t be tempted by a tradesman who suggests they submit one invoice to a resident and another, more expensive invoice, to an insurance company. It doesn’t happen often but this would be classed as fraud and the homeowner might be implicated as an accomplice (even unfairly). This could attract the attention of the Police and make getting house insurance in future almost impossible or extremely expensive at best
- Be cautious of any tradesman who tells you that the price they provide you with is time limited or ‘today only’. This is a high pressure sales technique and the trader should be shown the door, politely but firmly
- While it is reasonable for a tradesman to ask for a deposit to get the work started, beware if the amount asked for exceeds half the total cost or more as this might suggest that the business is on unsound financial footing. Around 20-25% is a reasonable amount to begin with; anything further could be paid in regular installments as the work proceeds (so long as it’s satisfactory). When you’re doing your due diligence as above, ask about how payments are made. Reputable tradesmen will be candid about these matters.

If in doubt, contact Trading Standards for advice.

Misc.

Unauthorised Subscriptions

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Further to the article in Bulletin 60 about a resident of south Aberdeenshire who had an unauthorised subscription placed on his account, Trading Standards have received a similar report from a resident in the Garioch area who recently went online to have a PDF document converted into a Word document.

This resident went online to look for a service which could convert a PDF document to a Word format for her. She came upon a Canadian company (which, unusually, operates under the law of Hong Kong) which offered to do the task for 50p per document, so went through the process of providing bank card details to pay the fee. The document was duly converted to the resident's satisfaction but a couple of days later, she noticed that the same company had billed her for £29.90. On querying this amount with her bank, the resident was advised that this company had also set up a subscription service on her account. Needless to say, that this had been done without her knowledge or consent, so the bank cancelled the subscription at the resident's request. The resident then contacted the company concerned who agreed to the cancellation of the subscription but refused to repay the money it had already taken.

On further investigation in the website's Terms and Conditions, the subscription is referred to, but in small text which would require close scrutiny to find it. Again, this underscores the need to be cautious when making internet searches for one-off services.

Should you find yourself in this position, please check the terms and conditions very carefully for mention of subscriptions, check your bank statement regularly for unauthorised transactions. Report any such transaction to your bank and investigate whether you can make a claim through Chargeback which we discussed in some detail in [Bulletin 38](#). Please also see the Which? magazine [here](#) for further information about Chargeback.

Energy Saving Devices

Trading Standards recently received a report from a resident in north Aberdeenshire about an energy saving device (sometimes called a voltage or current stabiliser) which he bought online for a small sum from a well-known website. Given the ongoing cost of living crisis, there seems to be no shortage of these devices on offer which all claim to reduce the use of electricity at home.

This resident then followed the instructions which came with the device and plugged it into a wall socket. The device thereafter stayed in place for a couple of weeks, apparently without any problems.

However, after a few weeks of being in place, one night the resident came downstairs by chance and discovered that the energy saving device had burst



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into flames and melted, as well as causing substantial damage to the wall socket, surrounding wall and counter top beneath the socket. It was purely by chance this had all been discovered. Had this not been the case, the possibilities could have been horrific. The subsequent repairs will cost a considerable amount of money.

Under the Consumer Rights Act 2015, all goods which are for sale should be satisfactory, a term which includes safe to use and fit for purpose. Clearly this device had been neither. Trading Standards urges people who are considering using such appliances to be extremely cautious about doing so for the above reasons and simply to avoid using them or stop using them if they are currently being used. Claims about their benefits appear to have little basis in truth. The Which? magazine recently featured an excellent article which provides details of their findings on these devices. That article can be found [here](#).

Our inquiries into this device are continuing.

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 or to Keep It Out at <https://keep-it-out.co.uk/anonymous-reporting/>

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.



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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>