

From mountain to sea

# Bogus Calling and Scams Bulletin No.63

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.

## **Bogus Calling**

### Roofing scam

Trading Standards were recently contacted by a resident of south Aberdeenshire who was anxious about the fitness of his roof to withstand bad weather. As coincidence would have it, just at that time he was approached at home by a male who claimed to be a roofer and who was able to help. This male was somewhat pushy but articulate and credible. Unusually, he drove a white motor car which he used to transport materials and tools in rather than a van or small lorry.

The male immediately climbed onto the resident's roof to undertake an inspection and advised that the problem was worse than anticipated. He estimated that the work would cost £5000 to complete. The male then started removing guttering and ended up by securing a tarpaulin over part of the roof whilst promising to come back in a couple of days to progress the work.

In fact, the male did return, twice. On the first occasion it was to re-secure the tarpaulin which had come loose and on the second it was apparently to start the job proper. On the second occasion, the resident handed over £3000 to the male who advised that he would return in a couple of hours with materials, but he hasn't been seen since. Also, the resident had not been provided with any paperwork. He later accepted that he had been scammed and that he may not see his money again. The matter was later reported to Police Scotland and Trading Standards.

This situation is slightly unusual in that this rogue trader approached the resident exactly at the time the resident needed a roofer. As with similar situations, please remember:

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- If a suspected bogus caller comes to your home, it is safest to thank them for their concern/interest but just say no. The risk that they are rogue traders or out and out scammers is just too high.
- If they become pushy or insistent, make your excuses, such as advising that you have a pot boiling over on the stove or a visitor waiting for you to return indoors and leave.
- Lock the door(s) behind you so that the caller can't follow you into the house. If they do, tell them to leave or you'll call the Police.
- Even before anything of this sort happens, if you can, arrange with a trusted neighbour that if you need them, they can come over at short notice to help you deal with the caller and provide support afterwards. This is called a 'nominated neighbour'.
- Avoid picking traders off of the internet at random, especially from social media. This is a hunting ground for scammers. Use reliable websites such as Trustatrader, Checkatrade, Trustedtrader.scot and Aberdeen Care and Repair but still treat the trader with caution as they are still an unknown quantity at this stage.
- Speak to friends, family and neighbours about the work you want done. Ask them if they can recommend a trader who they've had work for them.
- Once you have a shortlist, contact at least three traders to ask them for quotes for the work to be done.
- If you get three or more quotes, at this point obtain and confirm contact details for each trader in case a dispute arises in the future so you'll know who they are and where you can contact them.
- Remember, once you've agreed to proceed with a trader, you have a legal right to a 14 day cooling off period in which you can change your mind. Use this time wisely to confirm that you're happy to proceed with this trader.
- About this time is the time to establish how you will pay the trader. Try to avoid paying in cash in favour of paying by cheque or direct bank transfer as these methods will provide you with a cash trail.
- If you must pay cash, be sure to obtain a proper receipt from the trader. Do not let this slip. It might also be worth having a witness with you when you hand over the cash. Get the trader to count it in front of you.
- Don't pay for the total cost up front. Agree a proportion of the total cost. About 20-25% is a reasonable starting point for an initial payment, but can vary somewhat due to the type, value and complexity of the work. The balance can be paid on completion or, if it's a big job, in stages as the work progresses – if it progresses satisfactorily. Ultimately though, this should be agreed between the householder and the trader based on the work required.

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- Keep all paperwork which the trader gives you, such as receipts, invoices etc. safe as they are documentary evidence, should the need arise. Don't accept verbal quotes, assurances or promises as these have very limited legal weight.
- If the trader is pushy, insists on cash payments and is speaking about taking you to the bank to withdraw cash, alarm bells should ring in your head. Seek help from a friend or neighbour. As a last ditch measure, when you get to the bank, staff may ask to speak to you alone and in private, to discuss the need for the withdrawal. Use this opportunity to ask for help and for the Police to be contacted.
- To avoid getting into the situation when you become desperate for a roofer's help, once you get a trader who you trust, ask them on an annual basis to come round and inspect your roof to put right anything which needs attention before the bad weather hits.

Remember too Trading Standards can provide advice at any point in the above process. Contact details are at the end of this bulletin.

### **Scams etc.**

#### Insulation Scam

One resident from the Marr area recently reported an incident of concern to Trading Standards. The resident had received a phone call on her mobile from a woman claiming to work for a 'Government energy hub'. The caller advised the resident that she was calling due to a change in Government regulations (untrue) and that as a result her loft contained "illegal irritants" and "dangerous irritants" and that she would be sending someone round to do a "free inspection". The caller also kept asking "are you comfortable putting your family's health at risk?"

This caller was a female with a north of England accent, well-spoken and believed to be between 40 – 50 years of age but who was quite forceful and insistent that the resident was going to get a loft inspection come what may. It also appeared that at least initially she seemed to be reading from a script.

The resident quickly realised that the call was a scam and, despite feeling a bit intimidated and taken aback, began asking the caller how she had obtained her phone number. The caller then started repeating that it was "on the database" though she would not answer which database she was referring to. After a few minutes of this the resident simply hung up on the caller. Thankfully, the resident also had the good sense not to divulge any personal or financial information.

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Should you receive a similar sort of call, it is more than likely a scam and you should also hang up, block the number on your phone then report the matter to Trading Standards or Police Scotland. Contact details are at the bottom of this bulletin.

Ofcom also has some advice on how to prevent and deal with scam phone calls which can be found by clicking on the link [here](#).

### **Misc.**

#### Disposable Vapes

As regular readers will be aware, part of Trading Standards work involves the fairly recent phenomenon of e-cigarettes and their newer counterpart, single use or disposable vapes. These devices are bought, used and disposed of in their millions in the UK on a weekly basis.

What people may not know is that the batteries within these device are composed of lithium, a rare and valuable material which has to be mined from the ground. However, lithium batteries can also become a fire risk when damaged or corroded and can become an environmental risk if they leak when they have been put into landfill.

Aberdeenshire Council would like to encourage vapers, rather than dispose of their used vapes in their ordinary household waste, instead to bag them up with regular household batteries in the pink and clear battery bags that the Council provides and leave these bags for collection with your wheelie bin in the usual fashion. More information about the needs and benefits of recycling vapes can be found by clicking on the link [here](#).

Alternatively, these vapes can be placed in battery boxes which are situated at every Council Household Recycling Centre across the Shire. Locations of the HRC's can be found [here](#).

### **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 Bogus Caller, Rogue Trader or other form of scam, please report the matter to Consumer Advice Scotland so that Trading



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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.

Aberdeen City Council's Trading Standards department can be contacted by calling 0300 0200 292 or e-mailing [tradingstandards@aberdeencity.gov.uk](mailto: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](mailto: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>