



From mountain to sea

Doorstep Callers and Scams

Bulletin No. 68

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.

Doorstep Callers

A resident of the Garioch area recently reported to Trading Standards that he had been cold called at his home by a roofer who claimed that his roof was in a poor state and required some urgent repairs. The resident thanked the roofer but declined his offer.

Next day, the roofer returned and began work on the resident's roof without his knowledge and despite having been told not to. When the resident saw this, he challenged the roofer. The roofer claimed that he had gone to considerable expense obtaining materials for the work and that if he had to stop, he would be out of pocket. Also, the resident was concerned about leaving work on the roof part-finished, so he acquiesced and allowed the roofer to finish. The end result was that the resident received a bill for a four figure sum, which he later paid.

In truth, this appears to be a scam where the roofer has approached the resident with a common scare story about the state of his roof and where the roofer saw the resident's resolve was wavering, he played on this and went ahead with the work despite being told not to. The resident, being caught in a difficult situation, clearly did not want to be left with a roof that might leak.

Some points to consider:

- The resident was right to decline the offer of work by the cold calling roofer. As the saying goes "If in doubt, keep them out",
- As the work had not been authorised, there was no contract between the resident and the roofer, so the resident had no obligation to permit the work to continue or pay for the roofer's expenses,
- It may also have been prudent for the resident to have called a co-habitee, a neighbour or a friend to act as a witness in dealing with the roofer,

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- A polite but firm approach should be adopted with the roofer, to make clear the resident's position but not to aggravate the situation,
- Residents should note any information available about the caller such as the business name, address etc. displayed on any paperwork or vehicles, including descriptions and registration numbers of the vehicles,
- If the roofer refuses to leave or becomes aggressive, the resident should go back inside, lock the doors and call Police Scotland immediately. Even if it is not a Police matter, the roofer may have committed an offence under Trading Standards law,
- The matter should be reported to Trading Standards as soon as possible so that we can follow the matter up and the resident can seek advice about their rights as a consumer,

This roofer appeared to be a confident individual with a fairly calculating streak. It was unlikely to have been his first attempt at a ruse like this and is unlikely to be his last.

Scams etc.

Telephone Scam

One resident in the Garioch area recently received a phone call from a male claiming his name was Andrew and that he worked for an alarm company based in the south of England. This male, who had an Indian accent and who was very pleasant and persuasive, gave a name and phone number of the company he said he worked for and told the resident that her community alarm was out of date and needed updating. He also knew the resident's name.

'Andrew' also claimed that he could arrange this for the resident but he would need her bank card details to replace the alarm and that it would cost £200.

Taking 'Andrew' at face value, the resident began to provide her bank card details but part-way through thought better of it and stopped. She advised Andrew she wanted to confirm things with her current alarm provider and hung up. She subsequently reported the matter to Trading Standards. Later, she recalled that the week previous, she had received a cold call from someone asking about her health needs, which unfortunately she did divulge to that caller.

Further enquiry on the reverse phone call look-up service whocalled.co.uk revealed that Andrew had been busy, as a number of people had reported similar scam calls, sometimes the caller used another name but still had the accent and used the same approach. In some calls 'Andrew' had claimed that he was working in association with the NHS. In truth there is no proof that Andrew

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worked for the named alarm company or the NHS and appears to have been simply misusing their business details to cheat people out of their money.

Some points to consider:

- In this particular instance, it appears that the resident received a phone call the week before Andrew from someone asking about her health concerns. This may be a forewarning on more targeted calls to come, particularly aimed at vulnerable people. Well worth bearing in mind,
- Never divulge or confirm any personal information to cold callers over the phone,
- Never divulge any financial information to cold callers over the phone,
- Don't trust your caller ID in these instances as the caller may also be spoofing a genuine number on the display. Spoofing – presenting a genuine piece of information to cover a deception – is often used by scammers in phone calls and e-mails,
- As with this resident, before you commit to any course of action with any cold caller, check with your current alarm provider about the need to make any changes. Don't simply accept the cold caller's word for it no matter how plausible they might be,
- If in doubt, simply hang up on the caller. If you can, note the caller's number from the Caller ID or by using the 1471 service. Jot it down and any other parts of the conversation you can remember too,
- Be wary of blocking a number in these particular circumstances if you use the named company in normal circumstances as someone genuinely from that company may try to call you. If you don't use that company – block them.

Remember to report these calls to Trading Standards and/or Police Scotland, to allow us to collate as many reports as possible, which will assist us in taking action against the scammers.

Parcel scam/ subscription trap

One resident in the Deeside area recently reported that he had been contacted by a company in the Irish republic. This company had apparently tried to deliver a parcel to the resident but could not until an excess charge of £44 had been paid. Thinking the message was genuine, the resident paid the charge. Unfortunately, still no parcel was delivered.

A few days later, the resident noticed that a further charge had been taken from his bank account by this same company. Realising then that something was amiss, the resident immediately contacted his bank and reported the matter. The bank then intervened and cancelled the transaction, which had been labelled as a 'membership' but was undoubtedly some sort of subscription.

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As we have discussed in the past, scams evolve. It would appear that this scam is a bit of a hybrid, first hooking the victim with the promise of a parcel delivery, then snaring them in a subscription trap afterwards.

Some points to consider:

- Try to keep track of the items you order, which companies they are from and who the delivery companies will be,
- Be wary of e-mails or texts which come from delivery companies asking for additional payments. Delivery costs should normally have been dealt with at the point of sale. If you do receive such a message, try to obtain more information by e-mailing or phoning the company to find out more about these costs rather than simply following the instructions which were sent to you,
- If you have any concerns, phone your bank on the short code 159 to report those concerns and ask the bank to keep an eye on your accounts. More information about the 159 service can be found [here](#) at Stop Scams
- If your bank is not a member of the Stop Scams scheme, phone them on their regular contact number and report the matter,
- Contact the company concerned directly and demand a full refund, that your details are deleted from their computer systems and that you do not receive any further correspondence from them once this matter is settled.

If you think that you've been the victim of a scam, remember to report the matter to Trading Standards and/or Police Scotland for investigation. Contact details are at the end of this bulletin.

Misc.



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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://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>