



From mountain to sea

Trading Standards Scams Bulletin No. 142

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. For details of scams reported in other parts of Scotland please click on the [Trading Standards Scotland Bulletin page](#).

Bogus Callers and Rogue Traders

Trading Standards have recently received a number of reports over the last few days from across the Formartine and Garioch areas of residents who have been approached by men who have allegedly claimed to work for a company called National Highways and have offered to fill pot holes or re-tar driveways. These men have also allegedly claimed to have done work for others nearby and have spare material left over from those jobs which they could use on the job under discussion.

In some instances where residents have said they would think about getting the work done, the men have gone ahead and started work without explicit consent. When challenged, the initial price mentioned had dropped substantially.

In other instances where work has been done, residents have not been provided with any form of paperwork or details of their right to cancel the work, which is an offence. The durability of this work is yet to be established. Notably there have also been reports that these men have a contactless terminal for accepting payments from credit cards.

Readers might recall that we have received reports on previous occasions about men allegedly claiming to work for a company called National Highways. These reports included complaints about poor workmanship, high prices and threats to block driveways when payment has not been forthcoming.

Please remember that National Highways is also the name of the UK Government departments which maintains A class road and motorways in England and Wales.



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Our advice remains the same for any cold caller;

- Remain polite but firm,
- It's "Thanks but no thanks",
- Avoid discussing money with any cold caller,
- If you need work done on your drive, find your own tradesman after doing some research with friends, family and neighbours,
- Don't forget to look on the [Aberdeenshire Trusted Trader](#) website
- Please report any incidents like the ones described above to your local Trading Standards office.

Scams etc.

Trading Standards have recently taken a number of reports from consumers from different parts of the UK who have gone online to legitimate websites to look for another car then seen cars allegedly being sold by a single 'dealer' based in Peterhead. These consumers have then made payments for the cars using payments to the dealer through third party sites.

The consumers have then waited for their car to be delivered as agreed, only to find that after several days there has been no car forthcoming and when they try to get in touch with the dealer to query things, they have been hung up on and their phone numbers blocked. E-mails have gone unanswered.

Enquiries reveal that the consumers have each parted with substantial five figure sums of money. Also, the photos of the cars advertised were found to have been lifted from other sites on the internet and that no such business exists at the given address in Peterhead.

In truth, it appears that this is a car sales scam. The 'dealer' is the scammer who is actually based on the south coast of England. It also appears that the scammer is misusing the name of a legitimate business as the account holder accepting payment and the cars being advertised for sale are not owned by the dealer at all. The account holder accepting payment and the business name for the car seller are completely different.

Some points to consider if you are thinking about buying a vehicle online:

- Buying vehicles over the internet from someone you don't know is far riskier than buying from a bricks and mortar business you can visit in person,
- The sellers (scammers) usually portray themselves as small, independent businesses or individuals,



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- Vehicles for sale are often priced well below market prices to generate interest and attract buyers. If so, this should be viewed with caution,
- This price difference can be easily explained as the seller/scammer does not have a car to sell, so if a car seems to be a real bargain, stop and ask yourself why,
- Photographs of these cars can often be seen to have been taken on the forecourts of national car retailers due to signage visible in the background, or the cars are clearly in different locations when the photos were taken. A search on these photographs using Google Lens can sometimes tell if they've been used before (On Google Chrome, right-click on the image and select Search with Google Lens to see the results in a sidebar) If the photo has been used anywhere else on the internet, be suspicious,
- As obvious as it may seem, compare the registration numbers of the cars in photos to make sure they are all the same. Similarly, look for other tell-tale signs like the colour and fabric of the upholstery, the style of the wheel spokes etc,
- Business addresses provided are often located in residential streets rather than in commercial areas. In any case consider using Google Maps, Google Street View or Bing maps to look for cars on display in forecourts or on the street, business signage etc, to confirm the seller's address,
- When dealing with the seller, ask to see the Form V5C (commonly called a log book) or ask for a scanned copy to be sent to you by e-mail. Make sure the information in the copy matches the photos (registration number etc.). This will show that the vehicle actually exists and that the seller has possession of it to sell,
- If you can, try to arrange an inspection and test drive of the vehicle. Be suspicious if the seller keeps putting this off,
- Try to ensure any payments are made directly from the buyer to the seller's bank account. This ensures a direct link between parties. Check that the name on the seller's bank account matches the one you've been given when inquiring about the car. Try to avoid third party platforms as this breaks the direct link between buyer and seller,
- If you think you may have been scammed by such a seller or you think that a seller is trying to scam people, please report the matter to your local Trading Standards office.

Misc.



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As readers may be aware, one of the other important areas which Trading Standards works in is the regulation of the sale of age restricted products such as cigarettes and nicotine vapour products (vapes).

A recent article featured in the Scottish Local Retailer magazine highlighted the level of failure by some retailers to adhere to the law and refuse to sell these goods to youngsters who are either clearly too young or cannot produce ID to prove that they are at least 18 years of age, the legal minimum for these goods.

More than one in five Scottish shops sell vapes to children

Trading Standards Officers in Scotland have reported that 22% of retailers sold vapes to an under-18 volunteer during test purchases, while the figure stood at one in seven for cigarettes, according to their [2025/26 report](#).

Officers with young volunteers attempted 677 test purchases of vapes and 289 test purchases of tobacco at premises across Scotland with 148 failures for vapes, and 38 failures for tobacco, where sales were made to under 18s. In total 207 fixed penalty notices and five banning orders were issued by Trading Standards Officers.

Orkney recorded the highest percentage of tobacco test purchase failures (42.9%), followed by Shetland (37.5%), Stirling (30%) and Dundee (23.1). Of the 20 local authorities that carried out tobacco test purchase visits only East Renfrew, Edinburgh and Midlothian reported zero failures.

Chris Bell, Chair of The Society of Chief Officers of Trading Standards in Scotland (SCOTSS), said: “The health of young people is a key priority for Trading Standards and smoking is the greatest threat to their health and development, especially for younger children. These results are very concerning and we will be stepping up efforts this year to support sellers with advice and continue to take enforcement action where sellers break the law.”

Sheila Duffy, Chief Executive of ASH Scotland said: “It is deeply disappointing that some retailers are selling addictive and health harming tobacco and recreational nicotine products such as vapes to children. It is vital that retailers are held to account for under-age sales of cigarettes which, when used as manufacturers intend, will kill up to two thirds of consumers and e-cigarettes containing toxic chemicals that can damage developing lungs and brains over time.”



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“Progress on implementing the UK Government’s Tobacco and Vapes Act and the potential introduction of a ban on displaying vapes and nicotine pouches in Scotland would be welcome. Additional funding for trading standards teams across the nation is vital to ensure future restrictions on the visibility and availability of recreational nicotine products can be comprehensively enforced to protect children and young people.”

Luke McGarty, Head of Policy & Public Affairs at the Scottish Grocers’ Federation, said: “We firmly believe that vape and tobacco products should never be marketed or sold to underage children. There must be a strong and visible deterrent for those who deliberately or repeatedly break the law, including tough penalties and the potential loss of their operating licence.

“Our members have extensive experience in the responsible sale of age-restricted products and follow robust procedures to prevent underage sales. These include Challenge 25, refusal registers, and electronic till prompts that support staff in making the right decision. We encourage all tobacco and vape sellers to join the [Scottish Tobacco Register](#) and adopt similar safeguards.”

To report sales of illegal tobacco and also any underage sales of tobacco or vapes to your local trading standards use [this form](#)

(N.B. For Aberdeenshire in 2025/26, there were 18 test purchases for tobacco, with 3 fails and 26 test purchases for vapes, with 4 fails.)

Stop Press

Driving Lesson Scam

Police Scotland is issuing a warning to learner drivers after a resident in Ballater recently lost £325 after paying upfront for driving lessons advertised on Facebook.

How the Scam Works

Fraudsters post cheap block-booking offers that are significantly below average market rates.

Victims are pressured into transferring money via direct bank transfer.

Once the funds are cleared, the criminal deletes the advert and blocks the buyer.



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Advice

Always verify that a driving instructor is registered with the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) via GOV.UK before handing over any money. Speak to friends and avoid paying for full block bookings via direct bank transfer where possible.

If you believe you have been the victim of a scam, contact your bank immediately using a known official number (such as the one on the back of your card) and report the incident to Police Scotland on 101.

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://consumeradvice.scot/contact/> or call them on 0808 164 6000.

For urgent Trading Standards matters or doorstep crime matters, contact Aberdeenshire Council's Trading Standards at 01467 537222 or via tradingstandards@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

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.



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For more information about scams please visit the [Friends Against Scams website](#) or [Take Five](#) at their website.

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

All previous Trading Standards bulletins can be found on the Aberdeenshire Council website on the [Trading Standards Scams Bulletin page](#).

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