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Doorstep Callers and Scams

Bulletin No. 111

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

One resident in the Buchan area recently had a visit from a man claiming to be a roofer who was calling door-to-door offering to do roofing work. As the resident had been waiting for a local trader to do work on his roof but the local trader hadn't yet got round to doing the work, the resident decided to engage this caller to do the work instead. A price was agreed of just under £2000 and the caller immediately began handwriting a contract. During this process, the caller tried to include tasks which had not been agreed or even mentioned during discussions.

A couple of the caller's men, who were with him at that time, immediately began pulling down downpipes and gutterings from the resident's roof. The resident tried to stop the men from doing this but they completely ignored him and carried on until they had completed their task.

Once this had been accomplished, the men stopped and the original caller handed the resident a copy of the 'contract'. This contract gave the business address as Union Street, Aberdeen, but nothing more specific.

The caller then advised that they would return in four or five days' time to complete the work. The resident also noted that the contract stated that all work was guaranteed for 15 years. The men then left.

Next day, the resident phoned the caller and instructed him not to return. The caller tried to say that he would fix all of the issues. When the resident told the caller that he would report the matter to Trading Standards, the caller hung up.



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Fortunately, the caller has not returned to do any more work and the resident did not hand over any money but the resident has been left with his gutterings and downpipes missing and will have to engage a genuine trader to repair the mess, no doubt at additional cost to what the required work would have cost if done by a genuine trader. Understandably, he has found this whole encounter to be very stressful.

Clearly this bunch of cowboys fit the description of rogue traders but if this incident was a film, it would surely be a horror story.

Some further points to note:

- This incident underscores as well as any could why you should not entertain any cold callers at the door who offer to do work for you. As this poor resident found out, you simply do not know who you are dealing with,
- As soon as the agreement had been reached, the workmen started pulling down pipes and gutters, no doubt to try to prevent the resident from backing out of getting the work done and in clear violation of his rights to a 14 day cooling off period,
- The paperwork handed over to the resident was simply a joke. The stated address was extremely vague (no doubt deliberately) to prevent the resident from getting in touch, should there be problems in the future with the work. Given what did happen, that would appear to be almost a certainty,
- No cancellation rights were provided by the caller to the resident; a clear offence,
- The 'company' web address provided on the paperwork did not exist,
- Despite the business address stating Aberdeen, one of the phone numbers was a Fraserburgh number. Another was an Aberdeen number and a third was a mobile number owned by Telefonica UK Ltd (O2),
- However, the other number provided, a Freephone number, relates to a roofing company which is based in Manchester. These cowboys appear to have taken that company's name and given it a Scottish twist,
- Needless to say, the 15 year guarantee provided on the contract would be worthless,
- Trading Standards are aware that genuine roofers are extremely busy these days and waiting lists of 6 months are not uncommon. The solution to this, if there is one, is to book a genuine roofer as soon as possible and not to accept offers made by callers at the door,
- Further actions by the caller and his men were caught on the resident's video doorbell. Doorbell cameras can deter doorstep callers and if



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problems do arise, they can be helpful in identifying the business and the people involved,

- Should you have a cold caller at the door offering to do roofing work, please obtain as much detail as you can, say “Thanks, but no thanks”, then report the matter to your local Trading Standards office.

Scams etc.

Car Sales scam

One resident from the Banff & Buchan area recently reported to Trading Standards the problems she'd had since she bought a second hand car which had cost her several thousand pounds.

She had been looking for another car and had seen an advert on Facebook from a man advertising the sort of car she was looking for, so she clicked on the advert and made contact with the seller. This car was a few years old but was low mileage for that age of car. It was also advertised as a 4x4, which was just what she wanted.

The resident thereafter arranged a viewing and a test drive of the car. The test drive went well, though the resident noticed that the seller, who was also in the car, kept control of the car's handbrake during the test. However, the car performed well in a built up area, so at the conclusion of the test she agreed to buy the car.

She thereafter transferred the price of the car to the seller by direct bank transfer. There was no paperwork given to the resident from the seller at any point.

Unfortunately, a few days later after collecting the car, the resident discovered that the handbrake did not work at all so took it to the garage to repair, where it was found that the car had a list of electrical problems and that the main prop shaft was missing, rendering the car a front wheel drive only.

The resident tried to raise these matters with the seller but he ignored her completely, so she reported the matter to Trading Standards. It was around this time that the resident went back onto Facebook to check the seller's profile and though he claimed to her that it was a private sale, the seller had a suspiciously high number of cars for sale there. Clearly, with the number and nature of the faults with this car, which the seller must have known about, this incident amounts to a scam.



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Some points to consider when buying a second hand car in what appears to be a private sale or from a small business:

- Facebook Marketplace was not involved in this scam. It was simply the medium used by the seller to snare a victim,
- Please, please, never buy things or engage tradesmen via Facebook Market place. As with this incident, scammers proliferate on these platforms, just looking for victims,
- Never part with money until you have had a chance to examine thoroughly what you are buying,
- In this instance, when the seller was keeping control of the handbrake during the test drive, this should have been a massive red flag to any potential buyer,
- Ask the seller to see the latest MOT test certificates and service history of the vehicle you're considering buying. Examine these thoroughly. If the seller cannot produce them, this would be a red flag,
- Use the www.gov.uk link to check the background of the vehicle you're considering, to check any official data held about the vehicle,
- Use a reliable source such as the [RAC](http://www.rac.co.uk) or the [AA](http://www.aa.co.uk) to check other data about the vehicle which may not be held on the www.gov.uk website. There may be a small fee for these but it's better than losing thousands on a car,
- Obtain as much information about the seller as possible, including their name, address, post code, e-mail address and land line, so you know who you're dealing with,
- Before you make any payment, try to verify as much about the seller as you can by searching online, calling their number(s) during negotiations, so that if something goes wrong later, you are able to trace the seller,
- Be mindful of signs that the seller has many other cars to sell. If they do, they may not be a private seller at all but an unregistered business. This could also be a red flag,
- When you go to view the vehicle, take someone with you who is knowledgeable about vehicles and ask them to examine the vehicle thoroughly before you make a decision,
- Try to see the vehicle at the address the seller provided to you (is it a private address or a garage forecourt?), in daylight, so you and your second can examine the vehicle properly,
- Do not meet the seller on neutral ground as this may simply be a ploy used by the seller to make tracing them more difficult in future (potential red flag), should you need to. Try to see them at their address instead,
- Ask to see the V5C certificate, commonly called a 'log book'. Ensure the details about the vehicle are accurate with the vehicle in front of you and



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that the seller's details tally with the information they previously gave you. Private sellers should be the last name on the V5C,

- Be mindful of the address listed too. Is it the same address as the place of sale? If not, ask why not?
- If you decide to buy the vehicle, and it's from a business or someone purporting to be a business, always obtain a proper receipt and the V5C certificate,
- Also, make it a condition of sale that you receive the previous MOT certificates and service history receipts of the car. If you decide to buy the car, they're of no legitimate good to the previous owner,
- If you decide to buy the vehicle and pay by direct bank transfer, you'll need the bank details of the seller to pay them. Keep this information safe in case there are problems further down the line and only make payment once you're happy with the vehicle,
- If you decide to buy the vehicle, remember you'll also need to have insurance in place before you drive it home.

Err on the side of caution with transactions like these. The greater the number of red flags which appear the riskier it would be with proceeding with the purchase. If you find saying 'no' difficult, say 'I'll think about it' instead and once you're back home, text the seller to say no thanks.

If you're looking for advice on buying a second hand car or wish to report a seller you have concerns with, please contact your local Trading Standards office.

Misc.

Spam Phone Calls

One of the things which regularly gets mentioned to Trading Standards officers when we go out to meet community groups and give scams talks is the number of scam, spam or high pressure selling phone calls people receive, against their wishes. The levels of anger over this issue is substantial.

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) recently published an article about actions it took against two companies who, between them, made millions of spam calls to members of the public. Fuller details of the actions and the fines can be found on [here](#) on the ICO's website.

Cyber and Fraud Hub



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In a recent edition of the Bulletin, we discussed sources of reliable information where people could go to learn about scams and how to protect themselves from these scams. Well, there's now a new kid on the block in the form of the Cyber and Fraud Hub (<https://cyberfraudhub.org/>). The Hub is an Edinburgh and Aberdeen based charity, backed by some well-known businesses, who works closely with Police Scotland, Trading Standards Scotland, the banks and other partners, to try to prevent frauds and scams and to keep people safe. There are a number of very useful documents on the Resources page covering, amongst others, romance scams and how to recover a hacked Facebook account with, I believe, more to come. We will try to feature more about the Hub in forthcoming editions of the Bulletin.

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 the [Consumer Advice Scotland](#) website or call them on 0808 164 6000. For



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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 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](#).