



From mountain to sea

Trading Standards Scams Bulletin No. 143

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 west of Garioch reported to us very recently that they had a cold caller at their door who had offered to tar the resident's driveway.

This cold caller also stated that they had excess tar left over from another job nearby and that it would only cost £4 - £5 per square meter to have their drive done. This cold caller was also driving a green van with the words 'Highway Maintenance' displayed on the vehicle.

As regular readers will know, the claim of excess tar from another job and work being done nearby are classic tactics of the rogue trader who may take cash and never be seen again as they go off to 'make arrangements' or come back and do some work which quickly becomes obvious is a botched job. Also, if any work is done, once the resident commits and the work has started, the cost of the job will skyrocket to much more than the original estimate.

Thankfully, our resident wasn't interested and declined the offer. Our advice is similar; when it comes to any cold caller at the door, you simply don't know who they are and how honest they are so it's "Thanks, but no thanks".

Scams etc.

Home Insulation scam

One elderly resident in the Kincardine area recently reported that he had been receiving numerous phone calls from one particular company about loft insulation. These calls continued over a period of days and were quite alarmist



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and persistent in nature, telling the resident that he had to improve his loft insulation.

Eventually the resident gave in and agreed that a representative from the company could visit the address to discuss the situation.

During the visit the rep completed an 'inspection' and made a number of claims to the resident, such as the resident's house insurance not being valid as; the loft insulation was not up to standard; that all lofts had to be inspected every 10 years; that a large grant was available to elderly customers; that there was an instant discount if the resident signed up immediately; that there were signs of damp in the resident's loft and that the insulation that would be fitted would be a specialised type.

The resident then had to sign a number of forms, one of which was a 'release form' to allow work to start right away as the rep claimed to have workmen working nearby in the area. The resident also had to pay a deposit of just under £1000.

Next day, two 'workmen' arrived and spent a couple of hours laying loft insulation. Once the 'work' was done, the resident had to settle the balance of the cost which amounted to several thousand pounds before the workmen would leave. This was done by credit card.

Several days later the resident was speaking to his son when he described what had happened. A quick check in the loft by the son revealed that the insulation used was sheets of the same shiny silver material used to make space-age blankets and which endurance athletes and emergency services use to retain a person's body warmth. It was also plain that there was no damp in the loft. The matter was later reported to Trading Standards, Police Scotland and the resident's bank.

Our enquiries quickly established that most of the rep's claims were simply lies; lofts do not have to be inspected every 10 years; there was no large grant made available nor a steep discount given; there were no signs of damp, the insulation was hardly a specialised type and the release form was simply to circumvent the resident's 14 day cooling off period, allowing the work to start sooner and for the rep's company to get the resident's cash sooner too.

Some points to note:

- The calls which preceded this scam were simply high pressure sales calls, which were deliberately alarmist in nature,



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- In addition, the phone callers told outright lies to enable a rep to attend the resident's home and make a sale. Obviously, this rep then continued in that fashion with his own deceptions,
- If you are pestered by persistent scam or high-pressure sales calls it may be worth enquiring with your telephony provider about their call interception services, to weed out unwanted callers,
- Alternatively, you can let phone calls from unknown or unwanted numbers go to your answering service then vet them at your leisure and call the person back if you think it necessary,
- For calls which appear to be coming from other UK numbers, the Telephone Preference Service can still be useful in prohibiting sales calls. This service can be found by clicking [here](#) though it should be noted that they cannot prevent calls from abroad or scammers who ignore the law,
- It may well be that scammers like this have deliberately targetted elderly people. If you care for an elderly person, it may be worth having a regular conversation with them about the types of phone calls they have been receiving,
- Should you or anyone you care for be receiving calls similar to these ones, please consider reporting the matter to your local Trading Standards service or seeking advice on how to deal with them.

Misc.

Scams warning from Police Scotland:

I am obliged to PC Mike Urquhart of Police Scotland's North East Crime Reduction Unit for giving permission to reproduce the following article about how scammers are trying to hi-jack people's mobile phone numbers. It appears to be the sort of scam which could befall anyone with a mobile phone. I would strongly urge anyone to follow the advice given in the article if they think they have been victim of such a crime.

Fraudsters target a mobile user in Ellon

'SIM Swapping' is a type of scam where a criminal tricks a mobile phone carrier into transferring your phone number onto a new SIM card that they control. The criminal contacts your mobile phone company pretending to be you. They might claim they lost their phone or bought a new one and need to switch their number to a new SIM card (or an eSIM).



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If the phone company falls for the trick, they deactivate your real SIM card and activate the criminal's SIM card instead. Suddenly, your phone loses all service and signal.

Once the criminal has your phone number on their device, they can intercept text messages and phone calls meant for you. This is dangerous because many banks and apps use text messages to send two-factor authentication (2FA) codes. With your number, the criminal can easily reset your passwords and break into your online banking or email accounts.

- The victim in Ellon began receiving unsolicited authentication codes from their provider, O2. While on a support call, their mobile signal completely cut out. Criminals had contacted the provider requesting an eSIM overwrite.
- With the phone number compromised, fraudsters accessed the victim's banking accounts, setting up fraudulent automated transfers.
- The following day, the victim lost signal again. Criminals had successfully moved the mobile number entirely to a different network provider (EE).
- Fraudsters attempted point-of-sale transactions and credit card transfers. When family members called the compromised number, a fraudster answered, attempting direct extortion by demanding money under false pretenses.

Act on Signal Loss

If your phone loses service unexpectedly and you notice unrequested authentication texts, treat it as a security breach.

Secure Mobile Accounts

Contact your network provider immediately using a secure device to establish verbal passwords or enhanced PIN security.

Notify Financial Institutions

Alert your banks immediately if you lose mobile control so they can freeze savings and current accounts.

If you have experienced a similar cyber-attack, report it immediately to Police Scotland on 101.

Conclusion



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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.

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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