



From mountain to sea

# Doorstep Callers and Scams

## Bulletin No. 86

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**

There have been a number of reports recently from around the north Garioch/Formartine area of men going door to door trying to sell clothes to residents, some of whom are elderly and quite vulnerable.

These reports suggest that the clothes often appear to be well worn and frequently the wrong size for residents who answer the door, with some items coming still wrapped and other items which have had the wrappings removed. On a number of occasions, the prices asked for these items appear to have been quite excessive and transactions have all been conducted in cash, with no receipts or business cards provided.

On the other hand, these men have not been reported as being pushy and have always been polite to residents.

While this may not be a recognised scam, selling used clothing at excessive prices to vulnerable people is misleading, unfair and takes advantage of consumers.

Some points to consider regarding this type of situation:

- As with any other cold caller, you simply don't know who you're dealing with, so as a general rule we advise people to say firmly and politely 'no thanks' and stick to it,
- Also, as with any other cold caller, we advise residents not to allow doorstep salesmen into your home,
- Once you've made clear that you're not interested in buying anything from the caller, excuse yourself then close and lock the door,

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- If you do purchase goods from someone at the door and afterwards you find the goods you bought are faulty or not the correct size, without proof of purchase (receipts) or a business card to contact the seller on, you will have no means to seek a refund or replacement, so you will likely remain out of pocket,
- Selling goods door to door like this usually requires the seller to have what's called a Pedlar's certificate under the Section 4 of the Pedlars Act 1871. These certificates are obtained from the Police and it's an offence for anyone to act as a pedlar without one,

Should you have such a caller attend at your front door, please remember to report the matter to your local Trading Standards office. Contact details are at the end of this bulletin.

### **Scams etc.**

#### Subscription Trap

One resident of the Formartine area recently placed an order for a couple of items in a catalogue which she had received through the post. The items were intended for presents and the resident paid for them over the phone with her debit card. At that time there was no mention of any ongoing obligation or commitments from the company concerned and there were no obvious, similar conditions advertised in the catalogue.

A few days later the resident received a batch of 8 books through the post from the same company, at a cost of £35, which were part of a subscription which she had been signed up to. A check of the resident's bank account confirmed that it had been debited for the same amount by the company.

The resident called the company again to query their behaviour and to cancel the subscription. The female who answered the phone advised that she would process a refund and cancel the subscription.

However, a further check of the bank account next day revealed that the company had not only not refunded the £35 but had taken another £35 from the resident's account. This time the resident phoned her bank and complained to them. Bank staff advised the resident to give the company 3 to 5 days to process a full refund which, if not forthcoming, the resident was to call the bank back and they would pursue a refund. The resident then phoned the company back and told them this. Next day a full refund was back in the resident's bank account and there have been no further deductions made by this company.

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Clearly, this is another subscription trap, where consumers purchase goods or services and without it being made plain to them by the seller that they will be signed up to a subscription. The company then makes unauthorised deductions from their account using the payment method used for the original purchase.

Some points to consider:

- Be wary of catalogues or sales booklets which have been sent to you unsolicited. If you are tempted to buy from one of these, check the small print carefully for any mention of making a purchase committing you to and form of subscription,
- Also, if you are tempted to make a purchase, consider checking other customers' reviews of their experiences with the company on online sites like Trustpilot and take note of any negative reviews; the more reviews of a similar nature, the more note you should take of them (in the case of this company, there were lots of negative reviews citing similar issues),
- If you do see any irregularities, contact the company concerned and demand a full refund. Also demand that your details are deleted from their computer systems and that you do not receive any further correspondence from them,
- If this doesn't settle matters, as in this case, report the matter to your bank to see if they can assist with stopping any further payments and obtaining a refund via Chargeback (if the claim qualifies). [Further information about Chargeback can be found here](#),
- If there appears to be evidence of criminality, consider reporting the matter to Police Scotland,

Please also remember to report the matter to Trading Standards in case we can assist with obtaining a refund or to learn about your consumer rights.

### **Misc.**

#### Websites, Leaflets and Flyers

Trading Standards recently received a query from a resident who had received a flyer through the letterbox from a roofing company advertising its services. This company were obviously targeting the area close to the boundary of Aberdeen city and south Formartine with flyers.

The query was about the sort of information which is required by law on such a company's flyers, leaflets and ultimately, their website. In this particular instance, on the front of the flyer were displayed the company name, a land line number and mobile phone number, a website address and e-mail address and a QR code which led to the website. On the rear of the flyer were a list of the types of work which the company undertook and a statement that the company was a



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family run local company. On both sides were a number of photographs of pristine looking roofs and others being worked on, along with numerous promises that all work was guaranteed.

Following an internet search for the company's website, it was discovered that the website featured the same contact phone numbers and e-mail address as the flyer, numerous pieces of text on what types of work the company undertook and a large number of photographs of roofs in various stages of repair. However, a note at the bottom of the Home page advised that the photographs used were stock photographs (not those of actual work done by the company - and which may be under copyright with the owner). What was also notable was the information which was missing from the website.

The law requires that all businesses who sell (goods as well as services) to consumers must clearly display the following on company paperwork (including headed paper, quotes and invoices) and the company website:

When the company is a Limited Company:

- The full Company name,
- The full postal address of the Company's registered office,
- The Company number,
- The location of the Company's registration,
- A contact phone number,
- A contact e-mail address,
- The Company VAT number if the Company is VAT registered,
- Any prices on the website must be clear, easy to understand and include any taxes (such as VAT).

If the Company is a Sole Trader or a Partnership the name of the owner(s) must be clearly stated on all paperwork and the Company website, e.g. Joe Bloggs trading as JB Services.

Points to note:

- Unfortunately, flyers put through the door are not covered by this legislation,
- However, flyers and leaflets should be considered in the same vein as any other type of cold call such as doorstep callers, phone calls etc. Use the same caution. Remember, you have only the promise on the flyer that all work is guaranteed, but what exactly does that mean?
- As with any other cold call situation, you simply don't know who you're dealing with and how honest they're being with their claims,



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- Our advice is if you need to get work done on your roof, do your own research and find a tradesman yourself. Speak to family, friends, neighbours and ask them to recommend a tradesman who has done work for them and which they were happy with rather than dealing with an unknown quantity whose only contact has been a flyer,
- Further information about identifying a reputable trader can be found in the first article of [Bulletin 79 here](#),
- If you receive a flyer through the door and a postal address is missing on it and the associated website, it may cause concern as to how an unhappy customer would contact the trader to resolve a dispute, which is the exact reason for these pieces of information being required by law on websites,
- Using stock photographs on your website begs the question 'why not use photographs of your own work?' the answer to which might not inspire confidence. The photographs on this particular flyer were reverse searched on the internet and found to also be displayed on roofers' websites from other parts of Scotland and from Ireland.

If you receive any such flyers through your letterbox, particularly if the above pieces of information are missing, please treat it with caution and consider reporting the matter to your local Trading Standards office. We would be very keen to hear about them.

### **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**



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For non-urgent Trading Standards enquiries in Aberdeenshire, please contact the [Consumer Advice Scotland](#) website or call them 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 the [Friends Against Scams website](#) or [Take Five](#) at their website.

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 on the Aberdeenshire Council website on the [Trading Standards Scams Bulletin page](#).