

From mountain to sea

Doorstep Callers and Scams

Bulletin No. 100

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 of the Deeside area recently contacted Trading Standards to advise us that he had been at home when he'd been approached by a workman operating on behalf of a company which offers to clean residents' roofs, then overlay the roof with a protective coating.

This resident reported that the workman was quite forceful in his manner and the prices being quoted seemed to the resident to be quite high. He had no problem saying no to the offer but such was his experience with the workman that the resident felt he should report the matter to Trading Standards as a potential rogue trader. As it transpires, this company is unfortunately well known to us and the resident did the right thing in declining the offer of work. Many others have not been so fortunate.

Saying no to forceful cold callers can be difficult for some people, but there are other ways to deal with situations like these. Preparation is often the key, particularly at this time of the year. For instance:

- Place 'No Cold Callers' notice on the garden gate or driveway gate and similar stickers at the front door. For a doorstep caller to simply ignore these and continue up to the door may be an offence under Trading Standards regulations. These would apply to any type of cold caller, such as salesmen, canvassers or people trying to drum up business or sell things door to door (pedlars),
- Fit a video doorbell at the front door. These allow the resident to link them to a mobile phone or tablet so that the resident can converse with the caller without having to come to the door, sometimes when they're not even at home. Many video doorbells also record visitors at the door,

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which can provide evidence of the caller's identity if the matter has to be reported to Trading Standards. Prices are gradually falling for these and they can be fitted by a competent DIY-er,

- If there isn't one fitted to the front door already, consider fitting a 'fish-eye' door viewer which allows a resident to look through the viewer and have an enhanced view of the doorstep area (due to the convex lens on the exterior of the viewer) before the door is opened. If you don't like the look of the caller, you're not obliged to answer the door,
- Also, consider a door chain or door bar which allows the door to be partially opened, to allow a conversation, without the door being opened all the way, so preventing the caller from literally getting a foot in the door,
- Remember too, particularly as we go into darker evenings, the lighting at the front door. Assessing who may be at the door is only feasible if you can see them properly, so consider installing a passive infra-red (PIR) activated light covering the front door area so that you can see the caller clearly,
- All of the above items can be bought for a few pounds from well-know DIY stores and fitted by a competent DIY-er for just a few pounds,
- If you're going out into the garden (perhaps to do a tidy-up of leaves or similar), garage or shed, in case you may be approached by a doorstep caller when away from the front door, ensure first that your mobile phone is charged and that you keep it with you in case a caller becomes pushy or aggressive and you need to summon help,
- Likewise with any community alarm pendant you may carry,
- As a precaution against a doorstep caller catching you working in the garden etc. and deliberately engaging you in a protracted conversation to allow an accomplice to sneak in a back door to steal, when you exit the house, ensure all other doors (and windows are locked) from the inside and that you lock the door you exit by with a key - and keep the key on your person until you go back inside again,
- Even if there's someone in the house when you're working outside, securing the house can prevent problems rather than having to deal with them after they've happened. Let the person in the house know that you intend to do some work outside, how long you think it may take and to check with you if it takes longer (or get waylaid outside by a doorstep caller),
- Other tactics for dealing with doorstep callers are covered in previous bulletins and can be found [here](#),
- As always, please report any concerns you have to your local Trading Standards office.

Scams etc.

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One resident of the Banff and Buchan area reported to Trading Standards recently that she had entered a number of competitions she'd seen on Facebook which offered star prizes such a house, a new iPhone or cash alternatives.

The resident had then gone on to enter these competitions and paid the fees to allow her to do so. Thankfully these fees were quite modest. As a further inducement to enter, the competition organiser advised that once the paid competitions were entered, the resident would also qualify for further free prize draws.

However, the resident became suspicious when she didn't receive any acknowledgement from the organiser about her entries. When she queried this with the organiser the responses she got were very aggressive and the organiser blocked the resident from entering any further competitions, so she reported the matter to Trading Standards.

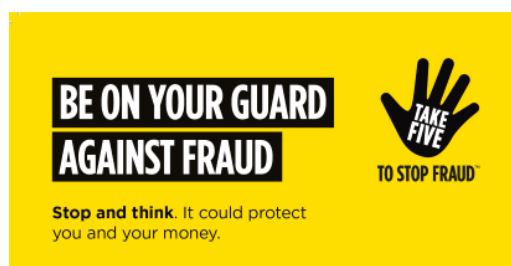
Unfortunately, by this time the resident had already made her payments to the organiser but subsequent to our initial enquiries, the organiser's Facebook page was taken down, by Facebook.

It's also worth pointing out that Facebook took no active part in promoting these competitions. Theirs was simply the platform used by the organiser to promote them.

While there are genuine competitions run through social media, our advice to residents is to be very careful if considering entering competitions on social media as there are many 'competitions' which are nothing of the sort and are simply means to part victims from their cash or to harvest people's personal data, for onward sale to other criminals. If in doubt, do not enter these competitions, part with any money or provide personal information.

Please also report any concerns you may have about competition like this to your local Trading Standards office, for their consideration.

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 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

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](#).