

From mountain to sea

Doorstep Callers and Scams

Bulletin No. 103

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

Nothing to report.

Scams etc.

E-mails scams

I'm obliged to one of our readers from the east Formartine area who brought the following matter to my attention.

It has been noted that over the last few weeks there has been a high incidence of e-mails being seen, some managing to slip through spam filters into people's Inboxes, which are, apparently, from the RAC.

Further enquiries show that these e-mails either come from an e-mail address which appears to be a genuine RAC e-mail address (such as Customer Support), are an apparently random string of numbers preceding a Gmail e-mail account suffix or have no sender information contained within them at all.

The e-mails cover a number of topics such as the opportunity to receive a free RAC branded Car Emergency Kit, insurance for battery breakdowns or prize draws. Some of these e-mails are fairly easy to spot as spam as they go on at great length, without pause and without much concern about grammar about subjects such as Vladimir Putin and US banks.

Others, such as the Car Emergency Kit and prize draw e-mail ask the reader to answer a few simple questions to qualify for the kit or draw.

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Our reader, who is also an RAC member, contacted the RAC to query this situation with them and learned that the RAC is aware of the situation and that these e-mails are in fact spam and/or scam e-mails.

Our advice in these circumstances is:

- The RAC took no part in sending any of these e-mails. Their good name is simply being misused by scammers to trick people into divulging their personal information,
- Likewise, Gmail took no active part in these scam e-mails; theirs was simply the medium used by some of the scammers to contact potential victims, usually en masse with thousands of e-mails being sent out at once,
- In all likelihood the purpose of the e-mails is to obtain people's personal (and perhaps later on, their banking) information and perhaps payment of some sort. Of course, we know this better as 'phishing',
- Once the senders have that information, they may target their victim directly themselves or they may sell that information as part of a large batch to other scammers who will do the targetting,
- Whether you're an RAC member or not, if such an e-mail lands in your Inbox and its contents are offering you anything, please treat it with extreme caution. If you are interested in the offer, please do NOT click on any link in the e-mail but open a new web page on your browser, search for the web address <https://www.rac.co.uk/> and search from there on the RAC website. If you can't find what you're looking for, call the RAC on 0330 159 1111 to make enquiries,
- If the e-mail has made it through your spam filters and landed in your Inbox, please forward it to the National Cyber Security Centre (<https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/collection/phishing-scams>) via their e-mail address at report@phishing.gov.uk so that the NCSC can assess the e-mail and perhaps take action against the sender,
- Then, move the e-mail from your Inbox to your spam/junk folder so that your e-mail provider can also assess the e-mail and perhaps block the sender,
- Once the e-mail has been sent to the NCSC, please do NOT then simply delete it. Deleted items are not scrutinised by e-mail providers as they are considered to be genuine and are left alone; only spam/junk e-mails receive any such scrutiny,
- Please also do not click on any links in these e-mails, even the 'unsubscribe' link as doing this may simply advise the sender that your e-mail address is live, so that they target you with even more spam,



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- As always, please then report the matter to your local Trading Standards office, for their consideration.

Misc.

Winter fuel payment scams

The following short article has been reproduced with the kind permission of the Journal of Trading Standards. It relates to a text scam about the winter fuel payment, of which there has been much discussion in the media recently and which has caused a great deal of public anxiety. It is also the sort of scam which can affect anyone with a mobile phone in the UK.

Aberdeenshire Council Trading Standards (ACTS) recognises that high profile news items and public anxiety about these are often things which opportunistic scammers will latch onto, the case in point being Covid 19, when Covid scams proliferated.

Our advice remains the same; please don't click on links or divulge personal or financial information as a result of texts from unknown senders.

“Cheshire West & Chester Trading Standards has issued a warning about winter fuel scams following reports that pensioners have been targeted with text messages offering to replace the winter fuel allowance with another payment. The bogus texts direct recipients to a website designed to trick them into handing over their personal details, including bank account information.

One of the hoax messages reads: “When you receive this message, it means you have received a new round of winter heating subsidies approved by the local council. Please fill in the link below in time to receive your subsidy.”

The public is advised to be cautious of any text they receive with similar wording, and not to click on any link they do not recognise or trust.

Councillor Karen Shore, Cheshire West & Chester Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport and Highways, said: “Watch out for fake text messages claiming to be from the Government, inviting you to apply for a new winter fuel payment.

“This scam has been widely reported across the country. Please be aware that the council will be contacting people they believe to be eligible for any additional payments using their own data. Do not give anyone your personal data after receiving a text message.

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“Please also check on vulnerable neighbours and relatives to ensure they are aware of this scam.”

In a similar vein, the Consumers Association, who produce the Which? magazine, recently featured an article about a similar scam about the same topic, but the methods used by scammers used were social media. It can be found by clicking on the link [here](#).



Christmas Safety Advice

Christmas is, unfortunately a time when scammers and thieves will target unsuspecting victims in all sorts of situations. Neighbourhood Watch Scotland have yet again produced a handy, single source of advice to help people avoid this happening. This is the Communi-tree, and it can be found by clicking on the link [here](#).

Similarly, the North East Crime Reduction Unit of Police Scotland are producing a series of ‘Stay Safe Online at Christmas’ messages covering subjects such as shopping, phishing and fraudulent charity appeals. Anyone wishing to receive future messages from the Crime Reduction Unit can sign for them at [this link](#), then select the option for Police Scotland.

Puppies at Christmas

Christmas is often a time when people think about buying a puppy as a family pet but it can be a bigger responsibility than anticipated and, as we have covered before, unlicensed breeders may try to capitalise on people’s wishes to have a four-legged, furry friend in their family. This [link to the Kennel Club](#) is a handy guide to whether you’re prepared for the changes that such a decision brings.

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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](#).