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Doorstep Callers and Scams

Bulletin No. 99

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

In Bulletin 95 we reported on a number of residents in the Mintlaw area who had had encounters with a group of workmen calling themselves National Highways. These workmen claimed to work for Aberdeenshire Council, carrying out road repairs in that area. This was then and is still untrue as National Highways do not carry out road repairs for Aberdeenshire Council.

It now appears that they have moved to the Inch area as there have been a number of very recent reports from that area of workmen going door to door seeking work repairing people's driveways. These men reportedly use a van with orange beacons and reflective chevrons, also marked National Highways.

It appears that most people have declined the offer to have any work done but one unwise soul did agree to repairs being made on his drive. Once the work had been completed, which didn't take long, the workmen asked for payment of almost £4000, which the resident disputed as being overpriced. The workmen then offered to reduce the price by £1500, which the resident eventually accepted, no doubt helped by the workmen's threats to block his driveway if he didn't pay.

Whether it's Mintlaw, Inch or elsewhere, our advice is the same:

- National Highways do not carry out any work for Aberdeenshire Council,
- The real National Highways maintain 'A' class roads and motorways in ENGLAND. They do not operate in Scotland; Scottish roads are managed by Transport Scotland,
- Undoubtedly these workmen have misappropriated the name 'National Highways' to give their scam some air of credibility,



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- Remember, when cold callers of any sort come to your door you really don't know anything about them, so you cannot tell if their claims are true or just hot air. That being the case, the safer option is always to say 'thanks but no thanks',
- If you need work done, look for a genuine trader yourself. Do your own research, ask friends and family if they've had any such work done and were they satisfied with the end result?
- Please don't ask for recommendations or look for traders on social media,
- Detailed information and advice on how to deal with cold callers can be found on the Aberdeenshire Council website by doing a free search on 'Trading Standards' and scroll down until you see Trading Standards Crime and Scams bulletin. This advice is usually in the first article of each bulletin,
- Or simply click [here](#) to go to the webpage,
- Please report any encounters with these types of 'workmen' to Aberdeenshire Council's Trading Standards department via the number 0808 164 6000 or 01467 537222.

Scams etc.

One resident in the Banff and Buchan area recently saw an advert on Facebook which was offering free replacement windows and doors if the homeowner's were more than 5 years old. Rather than enter his details on the Facebook page, the resident did an internet search and found the company's website and phone number.

He then called the number and spoke to a female assistant, who noted his details. She deftly avoided answering questions over the phone, such as confirming that the windows were free, and insisted that a representative would visit him and answer all of his questions.

A couple of days later the representative arrived at the door. He made a quick survey of the house and advised that the replacements could be done for £14000. He also stated that the resident should accept the offer quickly as, if the funding ran out, the cost would more than double. Believing (rightly) that he had been misled by the company, the resident declined the offer. The representative left, saying that he would call back again in a few weeks' time, to confirm the resident's decision

However, since the representative called, the resident has been inundated with cold calls and high pressure sales calls, so reported the whole matter to Trading

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Standards. Enquiries reveal that the company concerned is, unfortunately, well known to our colleagues in other Local Authority areas.

Some points to consider:

- Facebook took no active part in this matter, it was simply the medium used to try to snare victims,
- Searching out a rogue trader's website, as in this case, was simply a different route to the same outcome,
- Please treat all adverts on all social media, not just Facebook, with great caution. Many of them are simply the means scammers use to harvest victims' personal details for other scams or they advertise goods which don't exist and never arrive after payment has been made,
- In this instance the offer of free replacement windows was simply a way to try to snare this resident. There were no free windows, it was a classic case of being 'too good to be true',
- The behaviour of the female who answered the phone initially, in her avoiding answering any questions and insisting that a representative should call should have been a red flag that everything was not as it appeared,
- The spiel from the representative about a price of £14K revealed two things; the first was that any windows chosen would not be free, making a mockery of the original advert, and that sense of urgency imparted by the representative is a common scare tactic used by scammers and rogue traders to stop people pausing the think through properly in case they lose a discounted and/or time limited price,
- Should you find yourself on the receiving end of persistent or pushy sales calls or calls you believe are from scammers, there are two things you can do; if your phone line has switched over to the digital network, speak to your telephony provider about their call interception services (there may be a charge for this) but if you are still on the older, analogue service, you may wish to consider purchasing a call blocking device to intercept these calls. Please be aware though that if you're switched onto the digital service, the call blocking device may no longer work,
- As always, please report these sorts of incidents to your local Trading Standards office. Contact details are below.

PCN Text scam

Trading Standards have received a number of reports from across the Shire of people receiving texts about Parking Charge Notices (PCN). These texts come from the 'DVSA' and threaten the recipient with a charge for a parking infringement and state that if the charge is paid within 14 days, the charge will be lessened. If the charge is not paid, threats of going to Court and driving bans are

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mentioned. The texts also have a hyperlink for the recipient to click on, to make payment.

Please be aware that this text is a scam and a fairly basic scam at that. As usual, please do not click on the link or reply to the sender; simply delete or mark the text as spam or junk.

Further information about the scam can be found [here](#) on the DVSA website.

Misc.

Alcohol Licence Fee Scam

Trading Standards have been made aware of a scam targeting local authorities and alcohol licence holders. The fraudsters falsely advise the licence holder that their licence has expired and a payment is required to renew it. If you are an Aberdeenshire licence holder and you are concerned about a request for payment in relation to your licence, please contact the Licensing team by emailing licapps@aberdeenshire.gov.uk and they will confirm whether the request is genuine.



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

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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](#).