



From mountain to sea

Doorstep Callers and Scams

Bulletin No. 108

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

Trading Standards were recently advised about a notable incident regarding an elderly and vulnerable resident in the Garioch area who had a cold caller at their door.

This cold caller managed to convince the resident that she had had work done to her roof and that the caller was seeking payment for that work. The resident did not recall arranging to have work done nor the work actually being done. The caller was quite pleasant but very convincing, persuasive and persistent.

Doubting herself and not wishing to make a scene about the matter, the resident consented to make payment so she wrote out a cheque for £1200, which she gave to the caller. He then told the resident that if she paid in cash, he could offer a £200 discount on the cost, which the resident, unfortunately, agreed to. The caller held onto the cheque.

The caller then drove the resident to a nearby ATM machine in his white Transit van, where she withdrew £500. She thereafter gave the bank card and PIN number to the caller and he withdrew a further £750 (the exact sum was unknown to the resident at that time) before taking the resident home.

A few days later, the caller returned and took the resident back to the ATM machine where a further £400 was withdrawn. Some time later, the caller also cashed the cheque.

Several days later, the resident disclosed these events to a close friend and neighbour who reported the matter to the Police. Thankfully, this neighbour had

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also noted the caller's comings and goings and was also able to pass those details to the Police. Enquiries were made and, happily, the caller was traced and most of the cash was seized from him. The caller has been charged and reported for consideration of a prosecution. The resident's bank has also taken up the matter.

Some points to note from this situation:

- From the details of the incident, it appears very likely that this resident was selected specifically because she was elderly and vulnerable. This act illustrates just how amoral doorstep scammers are,
- Conversely, it also highlights how important it is to have a good relationship with your neighbours, if possible, to keep an eye on them and their property and for them to do the same for you, especially where neighbours are elderly or vulnerable. This is the whole *raison d'être* for [Neighbourhood Watch](#),
- Obviously, there are some specific circumstances about this incident, particularly relating to the resident's age and health, which might explain some of her actions,
- Remember, when a previously unknown cold caller takes a customer to the bank or to an ATM machine to obtain payment for the 'work', this is a huge red flag that the caller may be a rogue trader,
- The above point aside, as previously advised, where you have an unknown caller at the door; in a nutshell, thank them for their time; remain polite but firm; do not discuss money with them and if they broach the subject then change it to something else; make an excuse if you must but go back inside and lock the door. If you feel there may be any merit in what the caller has said then do your own research, find your own tradesman and get them to look into the matter.
- For more details on the previous point, please follow the advice described in Bulletin no. 104, which can be found [here](#) when dealing with unknown doorstep callers.

Please remember too to report these matters to either Police Scotland or your local Trading Standards office so that, at the very least, they can warn others and update their own intelligence picture. Contact details are at the end of this Bulletin.

Scams etc.

Letter scam

It's been about a year since we last received reports about them, but it appears that inheritance letter scams are doing the rounds again.

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A case in point; one resident in the Garioch area recently received a letter purporting to be from a solicitor in Japan who works for a large bank there. This solicitor claimed to have a client with the same surname as our resident, a client who was an 'oil tycoon'. The letter went on to 'crave your indulgence' about the client, who had apparently deposited over \$98 million with the bank then had been killed during the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The sender/'solicitor' thought that it was 'unjust and inhuman' that if a Next of Kin was not established this \$98 million would simply go to the Japanese Treasury. He then proposed that if the resident was willing to go along with his proposal that they could split the money evenly and that he, the sender, would use his share to benefit Ukrainian refugees through various European Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO'S). The subtext of the letter was that the resident had been chosen almost at random, due to having the same surname as the deceased person.

The sender then provided an e-mail address for the resident to reply to, if he was interested in this proposal.

Of course, this letter is a scam and there are some points to consider:

- Previously, this scam involved the death of a family during an incident in Burma and the sum was £10 million pounds in the deceased's name. In truth this letter is a slight variation on that scam, which is also cynically exploiting the current situation in Ukraine,
- As with the previous scam, the deceased and the large sum of money is entirely fictional. The 'death' of this person is intended to elicit sympathy and the promise of a huge sum of money is simply bait to hook the real victim, which is the recipient of the letter, our resident,
- The recipient's surname is one of the most common surnames in the English language, with many, many people having the same name and being much closer to Japan, and much easier to contact and correspond with,
- The letter also admits that for the estate of the deceased to go to the Japanese Treasury would be in accord with Japanese law. Clearly, what he then proposes would be an attempt to subvert that law; in effect an attempt at a conspiracy to break the law which would be unethical for a solicitor and possibly criminal according to both Japanese and UK law,
- The likelihood that anyone who had amassed \$98 million dollars would leave it dormant in any bank account seems implausible. Anyone with that sort of nous would have the money invested elsewhere, making more money for them. Citing such a large sum of money in a scam letter should be a real red flag to readers as the sum is just too fantastically large,

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- Apart from the e-mail address provided there are no other contact details included in the letter. It would be reasonable to assume that where \$98 million dollars is at stake, the sender would include a postal address or phone number, just in case. Obviously, a scammer wouldn't, because they would want the recipient to know as little about them as possible.

As this is the sort of scam which could land with anyone in Aberdeenshire, our advice is simply report the matter to your local Trading Standards officer and send the letter on to us.

Misc.



Trading Standards firmly believes that one of the most effective ways to tackle scams in this increasingly globalized world is through educating people about scams and the way of scammers. As you are reading this Bulletin, it would be reasonable to assume that you share this perspective.

In truth, enforcement action against scammers is becoming increasingly tricky as so many scam originate from abroad, with so many scammers also located abroad. Because of this, they are often beyond the jurisdiction of UK law and the reach of UK banks.

That being the case, can we take this opportunity to remind readers that, besides our bulletins, there are several other excellent publications which are available by e-mail, free of charge and which are very useful in protecting people against scams. These are:

- Police Scotland's North East Crime Reduction Unit Crime Alert. This publication covers some of the reported crimes committed in the North East and provides solid advice on how to deal with scams/frauds. If you'd

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like to receive this Alert, please send an e-mail to Crime Reduction at NorthEastCrimeReduction@Scotland.police.uk

- Again, Police Scotland, whose Cybercrime Unit who produce their Cyberbyte bulletin. These bulletins relate mainly to online security and scams and can be signed up for by completing the [Neighbourhood Watch Scotland page here](#) and selecting the Cyberbyte option,
- Which? weekly e-mail scam alerts from the Consumers Association. Sign up [here](#).
- Trading Standards Scotland (TSS) Scam Share bulletins, which cover scams that come to TSS's attention. This bulletin has a Scotland-wide focus and is sent out weekly by e-mail. Sign up [here](#).

You can also use this information to help protect others from scams by becoming a Scam Marshall with Friends Against Scams (who also produce a scams newsletter, though on an irregular basis). Further information about Scam Marshalls can be found [here](#).

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.



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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](#).