

From mountain to sea

Doorstep Callers and Scams

Bulletin No. 87

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 in the Garioch area recently had a nightmare experience with a rogue trader. The resident, who is elderly and lives alone, had been considering getting his chimney removed as he no longer used it. That said, he didn't plan to have it removed until spring or summer once the weather had improved.

The resident spoke to the roofer who he usually uses, for an estimate of costs, but that roofer advised that he was unable to help in this instance. The resident's neighbour gave him the number of another roofing company he knew about, so the resident called that roofer to get an estimate for the cost of the work. Within an hour the roofer had attended the resident's home despite claiming that the business was based in Glasgow. After discussing the work, this roofer gave the resident an estimate of £1000 for the work but only if the work was started the next day. The roofer was very persuasive and the resident felt obliged to consent to the work starting the next day, just to get the work done at such a good price.

Next day, three workmen turned up at the resident's home and began the work. It was noted that they did not use scaffolding while they worked and it was only later discovered that they had damaged gutters and fascias, most likely due to not using scaffolding. Once the work had started the roofer e-mailed the resident with an invoice and a quote for over £2000 and details of how poor the state of the chimney had been. As the work had already started, the resident felt he had no choice but to accept that price. At no time was he provided with details of his right to cancel or of a 14 day cooling off period.

The site of where the chimney had been was later left exposed overnight to the bad weather. The workmen returned the next day to complete the work and

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remove the considerable amount of rubble which had been the chimney. (The rubble was later found to have been fly-tipped by the workmen.) It was around this time that the roofer claimed that the work was more involved than he'd originally thought and that it would cost an additional £4000 to complete. Again, the resident felt he had no choice but to pay up rather than being left with a hole in his roof, so he made the payment by direct bank transfer to the roofer's account.

Eventually, the resident called a halt to the work but not before the roofer tried to extract a further £1000 from him. The resident also reported the matter to Trading Standards and sought advice. The resident will now have the headache of finding two other, reputable roofers who will provide him with quotes about the state of the work done by these men and how much it will cost to make it right and a report from each about the first roofer's shoddy workmanship. In truth the roofer who did this work was nothing but a rogue trader.

Some points to consider:

- Roofers are one of the most complained about traders and consumers should be extra careful before entering into any roofing contract. However, there are many reliable roofers; it just appears that there are many rogues in this trade too so it would be wise to be extra careful when seeking a roofer,
- Despite the roofer claiming that his business was based in Glasgow, he was able to attend at the resident's home within the hour. It would have been worth asking how this was possible; did he drive at speed from Glasgow, does he have a number of offices or was the work sub-contracted to someone else?
- Estimates and quotes are often confused but they are not the same thing. Estimates are a best guess of how much a job may cost and can be increased or decreased by a trader; a quote is binding on the trader and once agreed with the consumer cannot be increased. The trader should then complete the job for that figure,
- The £1000 estimate if the work was started immediately was simply the hook to get a new customer to commit and a means to get round the 14 day cooling off period. Next day after the work had started, the cost had more than doubled. These are common tactics of rogue traders,
- The resident had obtained the roofer's details from a neighbour. Crucially, as we later discovered, the neighbour had never had work done by this roofer but had simply obtained his details from someone else. It is fundamental to accepting a tradesman's details and considering hiring him that you confirm that the person providing the details has had work done by the trader and was happy with the end result, otherwise do not use them,

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- At no point did this roofer provide the resident with material information of their rights as required by law under the Consumer Contracts (ICAC) Regulations 2013, such as the right to cancel and how to exercise that right. This is a criminal offence,
- Other material information includes the right to know if the work has been sub-contracted and if so to whom; the total price of the job (including VAT), any timescale for completion of the work. The legislation for this is a little complex but Trading Standards can assist with this. Further information about consumers' rights can be found in [Bulletin 25 here](#),
- The quotes being provided after work had started appears to be calculated in such a way as to not put the resident off proceeding. Once the work had started and the resident had committed to it, the quote was provided with a higher price than anticipated (over £2000), apparently in an effort to get more money out of him and constrain the resident from changing his mind,
- Price increases after work had started are also common tactics of the rogue trader, usually accompanied by excuses of 'unforeseen circumstances', 'the job is more complicated than we first thought' or similar,
- As we noted above, this roofer simply fly-tipped the rubble that had made up the chimney, transferring the cost of clearing it up onto the landowner or, if it was tipped onto public ground, onto the Council's budget. In an effort to prevent this, consumers should ask to see a trader's Waste Carrier's Licence, sometimes called a SEPA Licence, or search on the [SEPA website](#) to see if a trader is registered to carry waste such as rubble or garden waste from jobs, for proper disposal. If they are, then the likelihood is that the waste will be properly disposed of, but if not, there is a real risk that the waste will be fly-tipped. If this is witnessed, rogue traders may well implicate the householder, who may then be prosecuted for the offence,
- As this resident made payments to the roofer by direct bank transfer in excess of £6000, it is important that as soon as he believes that he has been targeted by a rogue trader that the resident makes a complaint to his bank, to see if any of those payments can be recovered from the roofer's account or by other means,
- As the cost of this work to the resident was in excess of £5000, this would mean that the Simple procedure cannot apply and the resident may have to seek advice from a solicitor about trying to recover the full amount of money from the roofer.

As always, please remember to report these sorts of incidents to your local Trading Standards office for advice on your options and rights as a consumer.

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Scams etc.

Facebook Scam

One resident of the Buchan area recently reported to Trading Standards that he had accepted a friend request from a complete stranger on his Facebook account and within a very short time this 'friend' had managed to take over the account, lock the resident out and demand payment for allowing the resident to take back his Facebook account. In these circumstances there is only one thing to do and that's to contact Facebook itself, to report the problem at [Facebook/Hacked](https://www.facebook.com/hacked) (<https://www.facebook.com/hacked>) and follow the process through to its conclusion.

In truth, this new 'friend' was nothing but a scammer who had been searching for victims and had snared a victim who was just a little too trusting. The scam was a simplified version of the ransomware scam.

As you may know, Facebook is the most popular of the social mediums, with over 3 billion users monthly. Given that number of users, it is a certainty that a proportion of them will not be nice people and will be looking to take advantage of others.

So, what can we do to keep ourselves safe?

- Don't accept friend requests from people you don't know. If in doubt, contact the person off-line and confirm they sent you a friend request, otherwise delete it,
- Create a strong password for your Facebook account and don't use it for any other accounts,
- When logging in to Facebook, take a moment to check the web address is www.facebook.com; anything else could be a phishing attempt by scammers,
- Set up two factor authentication (2FA) so that to complete the log in to Facebook you have to type into the browser a code which Facebook sends you on your mobile phone,
- Never share your log in information with anyone else, even when they claim to be Facebook itself,
- When you're finished on Facebook, log out completely, especially if the computer is a shared one,
- Keep your web browser and security software (antivirus, firewall, malware programs etc.) up to date (this can often be done by setting the to update automatically),
- Never click on suspicious links on facebook, even if they come from someone you know,

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- Be very wary of entering competitions on Facebook which ask you for your personal details or financial information.

Further information can be found on Facebook by clicking [here](#).

Misc.

Shut Out Scammers 2024

As more people struggle with price increases and rising energy bills, rogue traders and companies may attempt to exploit the cost of living crisis and scam consumers by providing misleading information about products and services and posting misleading reviews online.

Trading Standards Scotland will be running their annual month-long Shut Out Scammers campaign throughout April 2024 aimed at empowering consumers and raising awareness of how they can protect themselves from misleading information and rogue traders.

Each week of the campaign will focus on a different issue which is likely to affect Scottish consumers:

- Week 1 (1-7 April) – Empowering Consumers
- Week 2 (8-14 April) – Impersonation Scams
- Week 3 (15-21 April) – Maintenance/Home Improvement Scams
- Week 4 (22-28 April) – Energy Scams

The campaign has a number of objectives and these are:

- To reduce the impact of doorstep crime by providing information and advice on how to prevent being affected by bogus callers and rogue traders,
- To ensure that consumers know where to find trusted information and advice,
- To ensure that consumers are aware of their rights,
- To highlight the most common doorstep scams and tactics used by bogus callers and rogue traders,
- To encourage consumers to look out for friends, family and neighbours and to report suspicious activity and rogue traders,

Further information about the campaign can be found on the [Trading Standards Scotland website](#).

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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



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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

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](#).