



From mountain to sea

# Trading Standards Scams Bulletin No. 116

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 the last Bulletin, we highlighted how a scruffy man called at a resident's home just outside Oldmeldrum to try to sell her solar panels.

Well, since then we have received reports from residents in the Ellon and Portsoy areas about a similar man, driving a similar small red car, and with a similar charming manner...

In the latest of these incidents this man has approached residents and made enquiries about their domestic heating system and insulation and tried to enlist them into signing up for his 'EC04' scheme.

On a couple of occasions this man has displayed a concerning level of interest in the resident's dogs and at one location, the man has attended at the same address several times.

Our advice from the last Bulletin on how to deal with this sort of caller still stands. However, as part of Trading Standards' new 'Protecting our Community' intervention strategy, and in response to these calls, last week Trading Standards officers attended at the homes of complainants north of Ellon and some of their neighbours to make further enquiries, offer advice and leave 'No Cold Caller' stickers and information leaflets (for concerned residents to refer to a later time). These visits were all well received.

Protecting our Community was launched on 9<sup>th</sup> July at Formartine House, Ellon.

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The event was attended by Councillor Alan Turner, who, alongside officers from Trading Standards, showcased the prevention products available to vulnerable consumers to help them feel safe in their home.



The initiative begins with a project focusing on the roofing sector, which has seen complaints more than double since Storm Arwen, resulting in significant financial losses to consumers.

The project also involves engagement with business to verify trading & contact details, checking paperwork and overall compliance with legislation.

A key component of the project is the creation of a Directory of non-compliant businesses that will list those that fail to engage with us, cannot be verified or do not address non-compliances.

Once active, the Directory will be accessible by members of the public via our webpage at <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/business/trading-standards>.

We will return to Protecting our Community in future Bulletins.

### **Scams etc.**

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### Telephone Scam

One resident in the Kincardine area recently reported to Trading Standards that she had been called at home by a man calling himself Malcolm (if that was his true name) about her Telecare system.

Malcolm, who did not say which company he was working for or how he obtained the resident's contact details, and he called the resident by name, then told her that her current Telecare system wouldn't work with the BT Hub and that she would need a new system instead. He also alluded to the switchover to the new digital phone lines and services from the old copper wire system. Funnily enough though, Malcolm had just the solution for the resident; a new pendant system which he claimed was digital compatible – at only £350.

Despite being concerned about the call and its implications, the resident thanked Malcolm for his call and hung up, without buying a pendant. Unfortunately, she did not remember to note Malcolm's phone number. The resident then contacted her own Telecare team who were able to confirm that the Telecare bracelet which she had recently acquired from them was fully digital compatible and worked directly from nearby telephone masts, bypassing broadband routers and modems. Needless to say, the resident was greatly relieved by this news.

Whether Malcolm was an out-and-out scammer or a high pressure salesman (and there may not be much space between these two positions here), what is beyond doubt is that he called a vulnerable person up and unnecessarily alarmed them, then offered a solution to the 'problem' - but with a hefty price tag.

Unfortunately, it's unlikely that this resident would be the only person 'Malcolm' will call on this pretext.

Some points to note:

- As already noted Malcolm did not explain how he had the resident's personal and contact details,
- Also, he did not state who he worked for,
- As soon as he spoke to the resident, he went into a well-practiced sales patter which was fairly insistent in tone,
- The resident formed the opinion from the background noise and chatter that Malcolm was working in a call centre,
- If a Malcolm calls you or a family member, remember as with all unsolicited phone calls (or callers at the door etc.) it's always "Thanks, but no thanks",
- If you are concerned that your Telecare system may not be suitable for after the digital switchover, your first and most important step is to discuss



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your concerns with your own Telecare team, not with any Malcolms whose only real interest in you is selling you this pendant at £350 each,

- Remember then to report these matters to your local Trading Standards team (contact details below) so that we can be aware of these calls.

### **Misc.**

#### Lebubu dolls

Some of our readers may be aware of the sudden and rising popularity of Lebubu dolls. There has also been a good deal of discussion in the media about these slightly creepy but cuddly toys, mainly surrounding concerns about large numbers of counterfeit dolls flooding the market.

Aberdeenshire Council Trading Standards are currently making inquiries with retailers in our area who may be selling these dolls.

From our own investigations, we have also found a good deal of pushback from some members of the public who clearly do not understand what is at stake here. These dolls are not simply a cause of concerns because they are counterfeit and do not conform with The Toys (Safety) Regulations 2011, but because they are counterfeit and poorly made. For instance, parts come off of the counterfeit dolls easily and may present a choking hazard to young children. We have also had one shopkeeper state that as they told customers the dolls were 'fake' that selling them was acceptable (it is not and is still prohibited by the Regulations and may be an offence under other legislation too).

Sales of these counterfeits are popular online too.

Signs to look out for of the counterfeit toys are:

- The feet on the dolls may be pointing off-centre, turn around and may even come off completely,
- The ears of the counterfeits are set too far apart; genuine dolls' ears are close together,
- The look and feel of the counterfeits are cheap, lightweight and of poor quality,
- The shoddy quality may also be reflected in low prices for the dolls,
- The packaging of counterfeits may lack a hologram sticker,
- Counterfeit packaging may also lack the CE or UKCA safety marks,

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The Press & Journal recently ran an informative article on the matter which can be read [here](#).

Trading Standards would encourage anyone who has concerns about the safety of these toys to get in touch via Consumer Advice Scotland on 0808 164 6000 or by clicking the link to their website [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.

Aberdeen City Council's Trading Standards department can be contacted by calling 0300 0200 292 or e-mailing [tradingstandards@aberdeencity.gov.uk](mailto: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](mailto:news@aberdeenshire.gov.uk) or 01467 538222 during office hours.



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All previous Trading Standards bulletins can be found on the Aberdeenshire Council website on the [Trading Standards Scams Bulletin page](#).