

From mountain to sea

Trading Standards

Doorstep Crime, Scams & Safety

Bulletin 16

Doorstep Crime & Scams

- A resident responded to an advert on social media that was advertising Playstation 5's for sale. The resident contacted the seller and arranged to pay the agreed price by direct transfer to the seller's bank account. Unfortunately, no PS5 arrived. We would advise residents to be cautious when making purchases via social media and use an intermediary such as Paypal or a credit card, so that if the goods which were ordered do not arrive, you can pursue redress with the intermediary or credit card provider if efforts fail with the seller.
- A resident has reported investing a five-figure sum of money with an individual purporting to work for a well-known multi-national insurance and investment company. The scammer provided a high-quality prospectus, paperwork and correspondence that displayed genuine company and senior management details, creating an illusion that the scammer and investment were genuine. The deception continued with regular updates, follow up calls and access to an online portal so funds could be viewed and managed. Initially, a small sum was invested but as confidence grew additional funds were added. The resident was alerted to the scam when they were unable to access the portal and their money, and emails informing the account manager of this issue were not responded to.

This scam demonstrates how criminals can 'groom' their target over a period of time, by building a relationship and gaining their trust. These tactics are not new, but they are being deployed in an increasing number of scams such as investment and romance. These scams are targeted towards people who are seeking out options to improve their financial situation or meet other people, particularly concerning given the current climate where we have seen unemployment rise, furlough and an increase in isolation and loneliness due to the covid pandemic.

- A local business received an email purporting to be from the manager and requesting the transfer of £3000 to a specific bank account. A member of staff was alerted to the scam having spotted a small difference in the email address.

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- A resident received an automated call advising that their bank card had been used to make a four-figure purchase from Amazon. Call options were provided which, if had been accepted would have been used to obtain bank or personal details from the resident.
- There have been a small number of reports across Scotland of people receiving phone calls from 'the Government' about their National Insurance numbers being used in illegal activity. The recipient is then urged to press 1 on their phone keypad, with warning of assets being seized if they do not. Neither the UK or Scottish Government operate in this manner - these calls are being made by scammers. If you receive a call like this do not press 1 as this can open the door to the scammer and allow them to take a variety of actions against you, the least of which is being re-directed to a high tariff phone line to listen to a recorded message. Simply hang up and don't be taken in by the threats as they are made to instill fear and are unlawful.
- If you believe you are the victim of a scam, contact your bank immediately – you may be able to prevent further losses or get some money back. Bank customers tricked into transferring cash to fraudsters may have protection under the voluntary Code of Practice for Authorised Push Payment (APP) scams, which states that victims should be reimbursed unless they ignored their bank's warnings about the scam or were "grossly negligent" in transferring the money.

More information can be found at - <https://www.which.co.uk/consumer-rights/advice/what-to-do-if-youre-the-victim-of-a-bank-transfer-app-scam>

Safety

- A website selling items of PPE at significantly reduced prices has been brought to our attention over concerns it may be a scam site or the goods being offered are non-compliant. The website also fails to display a geographical address and the phone number provided is not answered. Enquiries are ongoing but residents are reminded that a lack of contact details and unrealistic prices can indicate that a website or the goods offered are not genuine.

Contact

For urgent Trading Standards matters, contact Aberdeenshire Council's Trading Standards at 01467 537222. For non-urgent enquiries, please contact Consumer Advice Scotland at <https://www.consumeradvice.scot/> or on 0808 164 6000.



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Contact Police Scotland on 999 if you need urgent assistance or 101 for non-urgent matters.

For more information about scams please visit Friends Against Scams at <https://www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk/>

Please direct any media queries to news@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or 01467 538222 during office hours.