DITCH THE PITCH

a guide for guarding against scams

A Publication from the SC Department of Consumer Affairs

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Dear Fellow South Carolinian,

Thank you for taking this step to arm yourself with the tips you need to spot and avoid scams. Education is, and always has been, a large part of the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs' mission. We understand navigating the ever-changing marketplace can be a daunting task. And with the rapid development of technology, scammers are more active (and more successful) than ever. It is with that fact in mind that SCDCA created this guide to avoiding scams.

"Ditch the Pitch" is meant to help you get ahead of the fraudsters. It also serves as a call to action; encouraging you to "beware and share" this information with your friends and family. You play an invaluable role in helping us warn more of our citizens about scammers. Thank you!

With Warm Regards,

Carri Grube Lybarker, Esq.
Administrator

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If it sounds too good to be true...

SCAM RED FLAGS

Below you will find a list of the most common signs of a scam. Be wary if someone:

- Asks you to verify personal identifying information.
- Asks you to wire transfer money or purchase a prepaid/reloadable debit card or iTunes gift card and give them the number off the card.
- Sends you a check, asking you to cash it and wire or send money somewhere.
- Poses as a local, state, or federal law enforcement officer. They may also pose as other government officials.
- Scares you with threats of arrest or garnishment.
- Makes you think their "offer" is time sensitive. **"Act NOW, or you won't get this great deal!"**

Bottom Line: If you are fielding a cold call (email, text message, etc.) never give information to the person and when in doubt, **hang up and follow up!**

3 ways TO DEFEND against phone scams

1. Don't fall for high pressure tactics

2. Be suspicious of wire transfer or reloadable debit card payment requests

3. When in doubt, hang up and follow up

RED FLAG: Scammers have also been asking consumers to make payments with iTunes gift cards. Businesses and government organizations will not ask for payment this way.

COMMON DIG

PHISHING

Phishing is a scam where an Internet fraudster sends an e-mail that claims to be from a business you may have a relationship with. The message asks you to "confirm," "update" or "verify" your personal information - for example your account number or social security number - or your online account user name or password. A website link for you to visit or telephone number for you to call may be included in the e-mail.

RED FLAG: Legitimate companies don't ask for personal information via e-mail and text message.

NOTE: Watch out for "spear" phishing attempts too. This is a spin on traditional phishing where scam artists have some inside information, such as your name or knowledge of who you do business with, which they use to seem more legitimate in their request for personal data.

cut and paste the link into

- Do not open any attachme
- Do not call a phone numb
- Use antivirus or antispywa
- Always review your person at least once a year. You ca 877-322-8228. Dispute un

GITAL SCAMS

SMiShing

SMiShing, similar to phishing, is an attempt to get personal information from you. The only difference is that SMiShing attempts come in the form of text messages instead of emails.

The message may ask that you verify or update information, or it could contain a link with a virus or other malware that the scammer wants you to download onto your mobile device.

> You've won a free $100 gift card, just click here to claim!

the defense

- Do not reply to an e-mail, text or pop-up message that asks for personal or financial information.
- Do not click on any links in an email or text message or your browser.

ents or download any files from an email or text message.

er contained in the e-mail or text.

are software and a firewall. Make sure to update them regularly.

al and financial statements carefully. Also review your credit report n get your report by visiting www.annualcreditreport.com or calling nauthorized purchases/accounts and incorrect information.

TECH SUPPORT SCAMS

Scammers call claiming to be computer techs associated with well-known companies like Microsoft. They say viruses or other malware have been detected to trick you into giving them remote access to your computer or paying for software you don't need.

These scammers take advantage of your reasonable concerns about viruses and other threats. They know that computer users have heard it's important to install security software. **But their goal is to take your money or personal information, not protect it.**

the defense

- Don't give control of your computer to a third party who calls you out of the blue.
- Do not rely on caller ID alone to authenticate a caller. Criminals spoof caller ID numbers.
- Don't rely on online search results. Scammers sometimes place online ads to convince you to call them. They pay to boost their ranking in search results so their information appears above that of legitimate companies. **If you want tech support, look for a company's contact information on their software package or on your receipt.**
- Never provide your credit card or financial information to someone who calls and claims to be from tech support.
- Never give your password to a cold caller.

CALLER ID SPOOFING

Scammers use fake caller ID information to trick you into thinking they are someone local, someone you trust – a company you do business with, maybe even a government agency or police department. The practice is called caller ID spoofing, and scammers don't care whose phone number they use.

While caller ID can be a great tool, it's not fool proof. Don't rely on caller ID to verify who's calling.

the defense

- Do not give a cold caller your personal information.
- If you're suspicious, hang up and call the organization directly. Find a legitimate phone number by searching the phone book, the back of any mail you might receive from the organization or their website. If you're still unsure, call SCDCA (844-835-5322) and we can help you find a phone number.
- Consider blocking the phone number. Contact your phone company to see if they provide this service and how much it might cost. Many smart phones feature blocking functions that can also be helpful.

RED FLAG: The caller ID contains all zeros, too many numbers, or is blank.

RED FLAG: Feeling pressured to act immediately? Hang up. That's a sure sign of a scam.

AUCTION/AD SITES

Auction/Ad sites like eBay and Craigslist can be great tools for buying and selling. They are also hotbeds for scam activity. Scammers may offer to buy an item you've posted, but when you get the check you realize it's for a much larger amount than you asked. The scammer will tell you to cash the check, pay yourself and send the rest back to them.

the defense

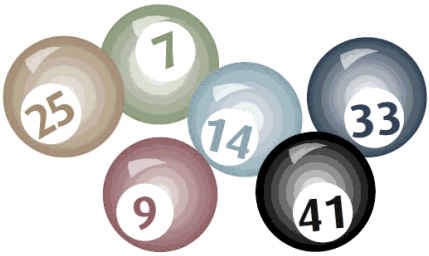
- There is never a valid reason to cash a check for someone and send the money back.
- Try selling to someone in your area. If you can't, talk to the buyer via phone.
- Be wary of a check for a larger amount than expected.
- Report the person to the site you are using.
- Request a check drawn on a local bank so you can make sure it is valid.

RED FLAG: Look out for spelling and grammar errors in e-mails.

COMMON SCAMS

LOTTERY/SWEEPSTAKES

The Pitch: Scam artists will call or write saying you've won a lottery out of Australia, England or another foreign country. Some scammers use the names of well-known home improvement stores or super stores and allege you were entered into a drawing each time you shopped at the store and... you are a winner! In these scenarios, the scammer will ask you to wire or send money to get your prize.



the defense

- Never send money to claim a prize, especially through a wire transfer. Wiring money to a location is like sending cash.
- Don't play along or engage with the scammer. It will only make them more likely to call you again.

RED FLAG: Legitimate lotteries and sweepstakes will not ask you to pay a fee to collect your winnings.

RED FLAG: Scam artists often say the up front fee is for "insurance," "taxes," "shipping and handling charges."

FAKE DEBT COLLECTORS

The Pitch: The scammer, sometimes pretending to be from a state, federal or law enforcement agency, will try to get you to settle a debt you supposedly "owe." The fraudster may ask you to pay a fraction of the amount, immediately, over the phone. In exchange, the debt will be forgiven. Some consumers have reported that the scammer had their personal information, making the call seem more legitimate. If you don't make the payment right then, you will have to pay it all.

the defense

- Never give your credit card number or banking information to someone you do not know.
- Call the organization the scammer posed as to let them know about the scam.
- Ask for something in writing from the "debt collector" so you can verify their claim. Federal law requires debt collectors to send you a letter about the debt.
- Check your credit report to see if the debt you "owe" is there. Get a free copy of your credit report at www.annualcreditreport.com or by calling 877-322-8228.

RED FLAG: The scammer threatens that you'll be arrested if you don't pay.

IMPOSTERS

The Pitch: Fraudsters will pose as your bank and ask for personal or banking information needed to supposedly "verify" or "reactivate" your credit or debit account. The caller may claim that the information is needed to reverse a fraudulent charge or an error resulting in your card being blocked. Scammers also pose as government agencies like the IRS.

A different spin on the imposter scam has the scammer posing as a friend or a family member who is in trouble and needs money. The "trouble" often ranges from car problems to being in jail. Instead of your personal banking information, this time the caller wants you to wire money to assist your loved one.

the defense

- Do not give your personal information or otherwise 'verify' your bank/credit card information over the phone.
- Hang up and dial your bank or credit card company directly and tell them about the call.
- Before you send money to a caller insisting your family member or friend needs it, contact someone who could verify or debunk the story.

RED FLAG: The fraudster tells you not to tell anyone about the call/situation.

DEFEND AGAINST OTHER POPULAR SCAMS

SECRET SHOPPER

- Steer clear of offers that come through the mail with a check included.
- Look for a legitimate secret shopper job through the Mystery Shopper Providers Organization of North America by visiting mspa-na.org.
- Never cash a check from someone you don't know and wire the money.

JURY DUTY

- Information about jury duty will come through the mail, not a phone call.
- Courts and law enforcement officers will not call or email you asking for personal information or money.
- Don't trust your caller ID; scammers can easily spoof their phone number to look like it is a local call.

HEALTH FRAUD

- Be aware of false ads for free medical services or products.
- Medicare and Medicaid will never call and request your personal information over the phone.
- If called, do not agree to enroll in health insurance plans over the phone. Ask for information in writing.

FAKE CHARITIES

- The Secretary of State's Office has a list of good and bad charities. Call 803-734-1790 or visit www.scsos.com for a copy.
- Avoid charities soliciting door-to-door.
- Stick with recognized charities that are well-established.
- Ask any cold caller to send you information about the charity through the mail.

HOME REPAIR

- Do not pay in full upfront.
- Make sure all details are in a written contract and you get a completed copy.
- Check with the SC Department of Labor Licensing and Regulation at www.llr.sc.gov to verify licensure.
- Ask friends or family for references.

SHAM INVESTMENTS

- Legitimate offers will not disappear overnight. Do not feel pressured to make a quick decision.
- Involve a family member or professional when a stranger promises a large profit on an investment.
- Think twice if you are told "your profit is guaranteed" or "there is no risk."

DOES A SCAMMER HAVE YOUR INFORMATION?

If you have shared your information with a scammer, there are some steps you should take to minimize the damage!

STEP #1: FRAUD ALERT

Place a Fraud Alert: Its FREE, stays in place for 90 days and requires a business to take steps to verify that it is in fact you that is applying for the good or service. Call one of the credit bureaus and they'll notify the other two.

STEP #2: SECURITY FREEZE

Consider a Security Freeze: Its FREE and will prevent a business from accessing your credit report for new products or services, unless you temporarily lift the freeze. You must call each of the credit bureaus to do this.

Equifax: 800-685-1111

TransUnion: 800-680-7289

Experian: 888-397-3742

You can use these numbers for both the fraud alert and the security freeze.

STEP #3: MONITOR

Monitor Financial and Personal Statements: Be sure that your bills and statements are arriving on time and are correct. ID Thieves don't just use your information to get money. Your SSN can be used to receive:

- Government benefits
- Driver's License/ID
- Tax refund
- Medical benefits

So, be sure to monitor ALL of your statements, and always be on alert for any suspicious or unexpected letters or phone calls!

FOR ADDITIONAL HELP:

Contact the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs' ID Theft Unit for more tips on dealing with identity theft and scams.

844-835-5322 • www.consumer.sc.gov

South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs
IDENTITY THEFT UNIT
education. guidance. enforcement.

Check out our YouTube channel. youtube.com/scdcatv

Find the latest scam alerts and news here. twitter.com/scdca

Look here for updates & educational materials. facebook.com/SCDepartmentofConsumerAffairs

IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION

REPORT SCAMS TO:

SCDCA: 844-835-5322 or www.consumer.sc.gov
FTC: 877-382-4357 or ftccomplaintassistant.gov
FCC: 888-225-5322 or fcc.gov/complaints (phone)

DO NOT CALL REGISTRY

Add your number to the Do Not Call Registry:
Donotcall.gov or 888-382-1222

STOP UNSOLICITED OFFERS

Opt out of snail mail marketing:
Dmachoice.org

Opt out of preapproved credit offers:
www.optoutprescreen.com or call 888-567-8688.

FREE CREDIT REPORT

Get a copy of your FREE credit report:
www.annualcreditreport.com or call 877-322-8228.

HELP US SPREAD THE WORD

Use this magnet as a reminder to warn your friends, family and others about the dangers of scams.

Scam reports help SCDCA identify fraud trends and get the word out to consumers on what to avoid. There is no report too small!

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