

Beware of Impersonators

Grandchildren

The scam targets elderly victims and works like this. A grandparent receives a frantic call from someone they believe to be their grandchild. The supposed grandchild is distressed and if their voice is questioned they say that they have an illness. The supposed grandchild claims to be involved in some type of trouble while traveling in a foreign country (such as being arrested, involved in a car accident, or needing emergency car repairs). They ask the grandparent to wire money to them in the country so they can get out of the trouble they are in. Typically the caller asks for several thousand dollars.

In some cases the elderly victim "fills in the blanks" for the scammer. For instance, the victim answers the telephone and the scammer says something like, "Hi Grandma, it's your favorite grandson." When the victim guesses the name of the grandchild that the caller sounds most like, the scammer takes on the identity of that grandchild.

A variation of the scam involves two scammers. One poses as a grandchild under arrest and the second scammer poses as a law enforcement officer. This person will get on the phone with the grandparents to explain what "fines" need to be paid.

You can avoid being scammed by doing the following:

1. Stay calm and avoid acting out of a sense of urgency.
2. Verify the identity and location of the grandchild in trouble.
3. Call another family member who can verify the location of the grandchild (this "distressed grandchild" will typically tell you not to tell his parents).
4. You can also try to contact your "real grandchild" by another telephone number that you have for them to see if they are in trouble.
5. As always, remember to never give out any personal information over the telephone to include bank account numbers or credit card numbers.

Utility Workers

∞ An unknown male contacted the victim pretending to work for City Public Service. He told the victim he needed access to her back yard because he was replacing meter boxes. The victim led the suspect to her backyard and left her front door unlocked. While being distracted by the suspect, another unknown person entered her home and stole jewelry from the location. To verify whether someone actually works for CPS call CPS Energy's Security Hotline: 353-4000.

∞ City employees with Universal City Public Works will have a light green shirt with their name on it. Normally they will notify residents by phone before they come out but of course if there is an emergency they may not have time to notify everyone. All utility and public works personnel should carry an employer photograph identification card. If there is ever any doubt or question they can always call the main number at UC Public Works (658-5364) or if it is after hours they can call Dispatch (658-5353, Ext.1).

∞ After a service person leaves your home (plumber, electrician, etc.), especially if they are left unattended for any period of time, walk around the house and check the window locks, especially those on the first/main floor. If they were in your garage, and you have a door leading to the side/backyard, (or windows) check those locks as well.

Public Officials

∞ At approximately 11:30 PM a woman was returning from Wal-Mart and was pulled over by what she thought was a local Police Officer. After pulling over she proceeded to get the insurance card from the glove compartment. As another vehicle approached from behind, the impersonator turned off his lights and drove away. This stretch of road was very dark at night which makes it difficult to see. Although this individual never exited his vehicle the woman was able to get the description as the vehicle drove away. This incident was reported to the police and she was told that they had a couple of reports of this over the past couple of months. The officer told her that if you feel suspicious when the police attempt a stop, you can do the following:

1. Turn on Hazards (alerts the officer you see him and are not trying to run).
2. Drive to a safe area (i.e. parking lot with a lot of lights/people).

∞ Most of us take a summons for jury duty seriously, but enough people skip out on their civic duty that a new and ominous kind of fraud has surfaced..The caller claims to be a jury coordinator. If you protest that you never received a summons for jury duty, the scammer asks you for your Social Security number and date of birth so he or she can verify the information and cancel the arrest warrant. Give out any of this information and bingo, your identity was just stolen.

The fraud has been reported so far in 11 states, including Oklahoma, Illinois, and Colorado. This scam is particularly insidious because they use intimidation over the phone to try to bully people into giving information by pretending they are with the court system. The FBI and the federal court system have issued nationwide alerts on their web sites , warning consumers about the fraud.

∞ Health and Human Services Commission is warning Texans with Medicaid coverage to be aware of a scam where a caller asks them to provide a bank account number and tries to sell them a replacement Medicaid card. The state is advising Medicaid clients who receive similar calls to report them by calling 800-436-6184. "Please don't give any personal information to these callers," said Texas Medicaid Director Billy Millwee. "There's no charge for a replacement card, and we wouldn't ask for anyone's back account number. Just make a note of the number the call came from and report it to the state immediately."