

Opinion: Ways to prevent being scammed during the holidays

By Armando Avina

The Washoe County Sheriff's Office would like to warn people to be aware of scams in which dishonest people pose as friends, family, respected companies and government agencies to get people to send money immediately. Already this holiday season, fraudulent activities have been reported about persons representing themselves as working through reputable organizations by telephone.

Scammers lead a person to believe that money needs to be sent immediately in order to help out a loved one or persons in urgent need. Scammers commonly receive information from social networking sites, where people frequently post excessive personal information about themselves and their loved ones. It is important that everyone know and understand the risks involved when posting information online. Most of these predators are from outside the United States.

Here are a few safeguards:

With caller ID, don't answer a call if you don't recognize the telephone number. That goes for restricted, private and unknown numbers as well. Allow the unfamiliar caller to leave a message.

If you don't have caller ID or a message system, answer the phone and request the person identify themselves and provide you with a call-back number. This pertains to people that are unrecognizable. Don't allow the caller to dictate the conversation. Simply hang up the phone on unidentified persons.

If the unwanted calls persist, tell the caller that you have already called your local law enforcement agency and they are investigating.

Do not post personal information on social networking sites. Advise your acquaintances' to do the same. Never post addresses, telephone numbers and places you are visiting or planning to visit.

Be skeptical of individuals representing themselves as members of organizations or officials asking for donations via email or social networking sites.

Be aware of whom you are dealing with when providing your personal and financial information. Providing such information may compromise your identity and make you vulnerable to identity theft.

Do not send money through electronic services if you're called regarding a loved one that has been incarcerated in another county, state or country without verification of that family member's status. Example, "Your loved one is in jail and you need to send \$2,000 through Western Union, in order to bail them out."

A "con artist" is someone who makes a living by swindling kindhearted people. These criminals will lie, distract or persuade people into making split-second decisions. Use good judgment and confirm information before taking action. A "con artist" constantly looks for new ways to defraud the public. Do all you can to protect yourself from these thieves.

The sheriff's office encourages the public to report these fraudulent scams to law enforcement immediately by calling (775) 832.9276.

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