

Natick Police Department

Investigative Services Division



Public Information on Active Scams

December 21, 2011

20 East Central Street - Natick - MA - 01760 - (508)647-9500

Over the course of the year we have seen several methods used to separate people from their money. Aside from the scams listed below we have received reports of those involving dating services, debt consolidation, magazine subscriptions, home improvements, shop at home and make money scams, chain letters and several identity theft events. Education and caution are the best ways to keep from becoming a victim, but we know it can still happen. If you are a victim please do not feel embarrassed. The police can assist you and will do so in a discreet and professional manner. Although it is sometimes impossible to recover what is gone, we can help you in protecting yourself for the future.

Please contact us if you are in need of assistance at (508)647-9500. If you are the victim of identity theft we have some beneficial information located here: http://natickma.gov/Public_Documents/NatickMA_Police/IdentityTheft

The Nigerian '419' Scam:

The victim is contacted by mail or email from an 'official' of the Nigerian government or officer of a bank/corporation. The victim is asked to provide bank account numbers so that a large amount of cash (generally in the 10's of millions) can be transferred from Nigeria. For providing this service the victim will receive a percentage of the transfer for merely 'helping out'. The victim may receive emails, calls and documents to support the request hoping to lull them into a false sense of security. When the victim is hooked they will begin to receive requests for payment of **fees/bribes that have to be paid up front**. It is not uncommon for victims to receive threats from the scammers. Variants of this scam have been occurring for decades which are an indication that people fall victim to this frequently enough.

Lottery Scam:

This is similar to the Nigerian scam in that the victim is contacted seemingly without reason. People should be cautious about winning a large sum of money **without participating** in the lottery. Variants include Irish Sweepstakes, Publisher's Clearinghouse or other seemingly legitimate entities. If you have won something there should not be any 'up front' fees. Scammers will target elderly housing complexes and are commonly contacting from outside the US. They can be very aggressive and have even called neighbors when a mark has changed their phone number.

Grandparent Scam (also known as the Canadian Scam):

So called because the scammer frequently targets the elderly: A phone call is received, often by a caller identifying themselves as a police officer who explains that a family member has been involved in an accident or been arrested. It is presented that money has to be wired right away to pay for a vehicle tow, hospital fee, bail or fines. Our victims are asked not to contact other family members so the party involved is not embarrassed or found out by

their parents. Money is sent via wire (Western Union or similar) out of the USA making prosecution impossible. One variant is that the caller may actually pose as the grandchild, niece or nephew. You would be amazed as to how much personal information is available on social networking sites including names and destinations that assist in perpetrating these crimes.

eBay and Craig's List:

After placing an item up for sale the victim is contacted by a potential buyer and a price determined. The scammer then sends a very genuine looking check (which might even appear as a certified bank check) in an amount far in excess of the agreed upon price. When contacted the scammer apologizes for the oversight usually blaming an assistant and offers a solution. All the victim has to do is deposit the check; send the excess back to the scammer and keep a little cash for the trouble. A few days later the victim will be contacted by their bank and told the scammer's check is a fake. We have seen this happen for small items, vehicles and apartment ads.

The SEARS Scam:

A local favorite: Victims are contacted by a caller who identifies themselves as their UPS driver. He explains that he has a brother or associate that works at Sears. The victim is courted into believing that they can receive fabulous pricing on high end televisions due to either overstock or employee benefit. The victims are directed to Sears and meet with an 'associate' of the store in the parking lot. The victim is given an authentic looking receipt and told to go to merchandise pick up to obtain their goods. After a few minutes of waiting the victim suspects they have been scammed which is quickly confirmed by store personnel. No matter how many times we have exposed this scam, victims continue to be enamored with this "great deal".

Paving Scam:

There are a few variations of this scam which always result in money lost and frequent property damage. Victims are contacted by leaflet or knocks on the door. The contractor promises they can re-seal or re-pave the driveway at a very favorable price. Often the contractor says they are already in the neighborhood or that they have 'leftover mix' available. This year we even heard the scammer reported they had 'permit problems' at another address. Once the deal is struck the scammer will apply low grade sealer, or worse yet, a mix of gas and oil to the driveway. The immediate result appears to be a good job, but problems arise when the substance never seems to dry or washes away. Most paving jobs consist of 'capping' the existing surface with a thin layer of asphalt. This process may change the grade affecting drainage or cause other damage. There have been reports of garage doors being sealed shut. Many victims have been threatened and cajoled into providing more money for unforeseen difficulties when applying the product. The elderly are favorite targets of these schemes, but they are not alone.