

Scam Alert Information and Trends



Hastings Police Department would like to remind its citizens of reoccurring scams that are happening all over the United States and unfortunately in our very own community! What are the scams you may ask? We have a list of the most common ones below!

****WHEN IN DOUBT, DON'T PROVIDE ANY PERSONAL INFORMATION OVER THE PHONE****

- **COVID-19 Scams:** You receive an unexpected/unsolicited email or text message from your boss, pastor, professor or a leader in an organization you are involved in requesting that you purchase Gift Cards and send the cards or the claim codes to a specific person to assist in COVID-19 treatments or efforts. We suggest you **immediately try to contact the person requesting the gift cards directly using a phone number/email that you know is theirs.** Always be suspicious of anyone who contacts you and demands money quickly.
- **Social Security or Identity Theft Scams:** You receive an unexpected phone call or unsolicited email about a “problem” with your Social Security number/account/benefits that you need to resolve immediately, or you will face arrest or other legal action. Or the scammer will say you have to make a payment to receive assistance for an identity theft issue or in exchange for a Social Security benefit increase. **If you receive a call from someone claiming to be from the Social Security Administration—or any another government agency—and they want you to pay a fine or fee using gift cards, pre-paid debit cards, wire transfers, cash, or internet currency, it is a scam.**
- **Amazon Scam:** Scammers are using fake caller ID information to trick you into thinking they’re someone who can be trusted. The practice is called “caller ID spoofing” and scammers can fake anyone’s phone number. You may receive an unsolicited call from someone stating they are a member of Amazon Customer Service and they may say your account is frozen. They may tell you that you need to purchase Amazon.com or other branded gift cards from the store (and provide the claim codes) in order to remove the freeze on your account. Other things they might ask for are your Amazon password, full credit card ID or bank account number. **Amazon will never call you to ask you to purchase gift cards to unlock your account or ask you to provide sensitive personal information like your social security number, tax ID, bank account number, credit card information, or Amazon account related information like your mother's maiden name or your password.**

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- **Family Emergency Scam:** You receive an unexpected phone call or unsolicited email from an individual claiming to be a lawyer, law enforcement agent, hospital employee, or a family member. The individuals request financial help or personal information to help the supposed family member out. Most of the time the person contacting you asks for money to be done through wire transfer or in the form of gift cards. **Set up a codeword with family members that they have to provide or tell them you'll call them back on a number you know to be there's before you proceed anything further financially.**
- **Marketplace, Craigslist or Classified Scam:** You post something for sale and an individual contacts you about buying the item(s) and wanting the item(s) shipped. The scammer will often send you an amount of money *over* the asking price; this is usually sent in the form of a fake cashier's check or money order asking for you to deposit or cash it. They instruct you to ship the item and keep some extra money to cover the shipping and for your time. The item is then shipped. A few days later, you are contacted by your bank about the cashier's check or money order that did not clear. Now, you are out the item and money.
- **Internet extortion scams:** You receive an unexpected message from an individual threatening to release embarrassing (often explicit) photos, videos other personal information to friends and family if money is not sent. **Contact your local police department and report the incident as extortion is a crime.**
- **Sweetheart swindles:** Online dating can be convenient but can turn costly. Be wary of "friends" you've connected with, but have never met in person. An individual "connects" with you online and wants to start a romantic relationship. The scammer will often tell you they are far away, often overseas, and as the relationship builds, the scammer will inform you of some sort of financial hardship the scammer is experiencing. The scammer will then ask for money to pay for various bills or even ask for money to come visit you. If you agree to send money, the scammer will inevitably request for more and more money. When you tell the scammer you've run out of money or don't have money, the scammer tells you to ask other people for money. The scammer will also make excuses about not being able to speak on the phone, video chat or meet in person. **Do not keep contacting the person, ignore their communication and use the flagging system on the dating site's webpage to mark the account as suspicious.**

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What can you do to protect yourself? Do not provide any personal or financial information to unverified businesses or persons over the phone. Hang up and report it to the Social Security Office of the Inspector General online at <https://oig.ssa.gov>. Report any suspicious phone calls to your law enforcement agency or file a complaint with the FTC (Federal Trade Commission) by going to <https://www.ftc.gov/>. It's also a good idea to monitor your credit reports, you can go to <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/> and receive a free credit report.

ALWAYS REMEMBER: a good rule of thumb for recognizing these crimes – a person you've never met in person requesting money be sent to them is almost always a scam, especially if the requester creates a sense of urgency.