



District Attorney's Office • 18th Judicial District

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Fraud Alert

Threatening Elder Scams

Trends and Predictions

"Message regarding an enforcement action executed by the United States Treasury intending your serious attention. Ignoring this will be an intentional second attempt to avoid initial appearance before magistrate judge or a grand jury (sic) for federal criminal offense. My number is 206-900-8697. I repeat it's 206-900-8697. Advise you to call us and help us to help you. Thank you."

Sound familiar? For the second year in a row, IRS and U.S. Treasury "extortion" scams topped the list of the most common complaints reported to the 18th Judicial DA's Office. These calls have tripled since the beginning of the new year. While few consumers report actually falling for these scams, such calls succeed in creating alarm, outrage and even panic among recipients. Extortion scams are typified by "pay now, or else" threats that are convincing enough to scare victims into sending or wiring money. An older, but very active extortion call in play is the "grandparent scam". In this scam, callers posing as grandchildren beg unwary grandparents into bailing them out of a "bad" situation by wiring funds. Last year, older victims in the 18th Judicial reported losing over \$65,000 to this scam.

Not to be outdone by extortion scams, "too good to be true" swindles appear to be sinking to a new low. According to a U.S. Homeland Security testimony to the Senate Committee on Aging earlier this month, criminals are luring unsuspecting elders through on-line vacation offers into smuggling narcotics in to other countries. Victims don't discover the scam until they have been arrested by customs agents who find the drugs hidden in the lining of their luggage. Variations of this scam are also happening over the phone; both of which advertise all-expense paid vacations, including free luggage, to overseas destinations.

A popular "too good to be true" scam that made the list last year was the "computer fix" – or "windows" scam, whereby a computer "representative" calls explaining something is wrong with the victim's computer. Under the ruse of fixing the problem, the victim is instructed to key in certain codes on the computer, inadvertently giving the caller remote access to the owner's hard-drive. This scam has been in circulation for a while and the number of older victims continues to rise.

Predictions: Expect to see a proliferation of telephone extortion scams, especially ploys that target older adults. Technology has revolutionized the telemarketing industry, thus making it possible nowadays for telemarketers, (legitimate or otherwise) to push out a record number of calls a minute. Criminal rings operating off-shore are behind many of these scams, and cyber criminals are known for continuously changing their tactics to keep up with trends happening around the world.

To prevent becoming a victim, never give out personal or financial information to ANY caller. Legitimate agencies don't call or email. Instead they send letters. And always check the legitimacy of a contest or anything that is advertised as "free" before entering. Think twice about entering contests on-line. For tips on how to block or filter out unwanted calls, and other related tips, go to www.da18.org. Click the **Consumer Protection** tab, and then click on "Alerts".

DA – 18 Consumer Protection Line: 720-874-8547