

DON'T LET THE BAD GUYS TAKE YOUR MONEY

Consumer fraud is increasing. There are more people out there coming up with extremely creative ways to illegally take money from honest people. Seniors are especially vulnerable to fraud because, as a group, we are more trusting, polite and generous than average. We are afraid of appearing rude, prejudiced, or selfish. The crooks know this and target seniors for their crimes.

Most of us believe we would never fall for a “scheme”; that we would see through it and not give our money to a “phony” person or deal. However, the swindler is an expert in how people behave, knows how to sound convincing, how to push us in into a quick, rash decision, and has a talent taking your money.

Some of the more frequent frauds are described below:

- Charity Fraud – Heart-wringing events– Hurricane Katrina, the tsunami, 9/11 ... - always result in an outpouring of contributions from Americans. However, a portion of this never gets to the victims. In some cases, according to the EauClaire District Attorney, “as little as 35 cents of every one hundred dollars was actually used for charitable purposes.” To protect yourself, deal with charities you know personally, preferably local organizations, and do not respond to email or telephone solicitations. You can also check out a charity at www.give.org, www.charitynavigator.org, or www.guidestar.org (fee based).
- Jury Duty Fraud – The “County Clerk’s Office” notifies you, by phone, that you didn’t show up for jury duty and will be arrested. However, if you give them your Social Security and driver’s license numbers, they will take care of it. This information is then used to steal your identity. If this happens **do not** provide any information. Call the Racine County Court House (262-636-3333) to report the calls.
- Home Repair Fraud – According to local law enforcement this is one of the most common fraud in Racine County, but one that is easy to avoid. Do not fall for “door to door/just in the neighborhood can do your work cheaply” sales pitch. Always deal with a repair service you know, or one that has been recommended to you, and be sure to have a written, agreed-to estimate before work starts. If you need to deal with a new firm, ask for references and check it out on the court website, www.wcca.wicourts.gov.
- Foreign Lottery/Bank Transfer Fraud – In both of these, you are notified that there is money in a foreign country that is yours. They will send you a certified check, all you need to do is cash it, and send them a personal check for a handling fees. Since you have cashed the certified check you think you are safe. However, after a 1-2 week period, your bank notifies you the certified check is false, and you owe your bank the money. Your personal check, of course, has been cashed. If approached by someone with this proposition, do not participate, but call the police.

- Bank Examiner Scam – You are approached by someone who pretends to be a bank official investigating an internal theft. You are asked to provide information on your accounts, and to withdraw money from the suspected teller. The “bank official” takes the money and account statements to inventory them and promises to return them later. Unfortunately they never do and may use the account information to drain your account. A law enforcement official will never ask you to do this. If approached, simply decline and call the police immediately.
- Ruse Entry Burglary – A crook gains entry to your house under false pretense. They may claim to be from the utility, phone or cable company, may pretend to work for the city and need to fix concrete around your house for free, they may ask for a pail of water While one keeps you busy an accomplice will enter and search your home for valuables. Do not open your door for anyone you do not know. Call any company they claim to represent, to verify who they are. If they make you uncomfortable call the police. It is better to be rude than a victim.

These are only a few of the frauds currently being used to take money from trusting seniors. There are a number of websites – www.fraud.org, www.ottawapolice.ca, www.la4seniors.com – that describe numerous other frauds. What they have in common is that they are usually “too good to be true”. You help a lot of people; you obtain a great return on an investment; someone gives you free money; or you help law enforcement. Be suspicious of these, especially if there is an element of “high pressure” and you have to act quickly, and avoid these propositions. Very few, if any, will be legitimate.

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