

COVID-19 SCAMS

Don't Become a Victim

As the novel coronavirus pandemic continues to impact the United States, scammers have seized the opportunity to prey on consumers — particularly senior citizens. In reality, however, no one is safe. Text message scams, scam robocalls, fake emails and social media posts, even official-looking letters in the mail hit as fast as the pandemic itself.

Opportunists are unscrupulous and surface faster than you can blink an eye each time there is a crisis. They target anyone and everyone they think will take the bait. In fact, with today's technology, they don't even bother to single out a particular group; they just go after the masses.

"These people are preying on financial and medical fears tied to the pandemic," said Suzanne Beatty, Director of CWA Local 1180's Retiree Division. "With the current situation, and knowing that many seniors are more isolated now than ever before, scammers are constantly changing their tactics to catch people off guard. We are encouraging everyone to be more vigilant and remember that if something sounds too good to be true, it probably is."

The Better Business Bureau website reports a large increase in the number of complaints since the pandemic began, with schemes often manifesting as someone impersonating a respected agency or government entity. Beatty said the bottom line is that no one should respond to a text, an email, or a phone call from a sender that is unfamiliar, even if it looks or sounds official or from a respected agency. "The best thing to do is hang up immediately if it's a phone call before the caller has a chance to engage you, or delete the text or email right away before you can even consider responding," she said.

Seniors aren't the only ones to fall victim, however. Students home from college, high schoolers trying to fill time, and just about anyone distracted, overwhelmed, or distraught by the current pandemic is an easy target.

Local 1180 Assistant Supervisor of Staff Reps Teesha Foreman said the union has received an increase in calls from members questioning whether some of what they have been receiving is real. "Some scammers have been around a long time and have perfected their pitches so much that they really do sound legitimate," Foreman said. "That's why it is so easy, especially in times of duress, for people to become a victim. The easiest way to steer clear is to remember that if you do not know the person on the other end of the line, hang up. If it's that important, they will call back and leave a message. You can listen to it, have someone else listen to it, and then decide if it's legitimate."

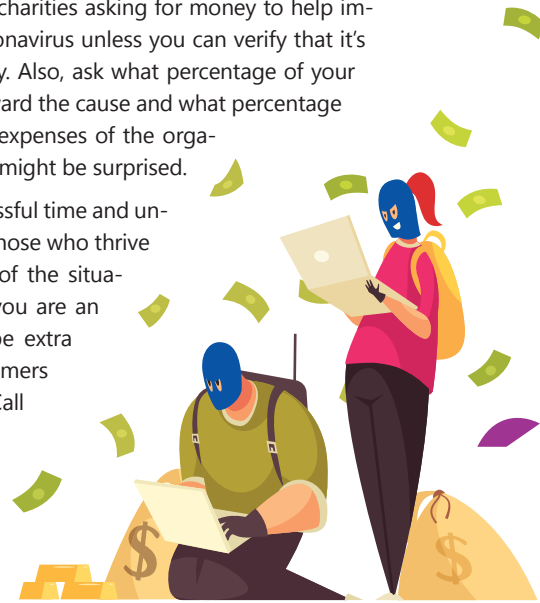
For the most up-to-date information on the coronavirus scams, go to <https://www.ftc.gov/coronavirus> (yes, this is a safe url).

Here are some basic rules to follow, as well as some coronavirus-specific scams that have already surfaced.

- Never give out your Social Security number, financial information, or personal information to anyone. If someone asks you to confirm it, do not.
- Do not transfer money or pay for something in advance of receiving a product or service. You will not get that product or service.

- Do not respond to calls or texts from unknown numbers.
- Never click on any link in a text message if you do not know who sent you the text message. If the text does come from someone who you know but the link seems odd, call that person and ask if they sent it.
- Government agencies will NEVER ask you for personal or financial information over the phone or in a text or email, and will NEVER ask you to send money.
- There is no vaccine for the coronavirus, Medicare is not offering a health kit, the CDC is not giving you a chance to purchase a vaccine kit, the Social Security Administration does not have a problem with your social security number that's preventing the government from issuing you a stimulus check, and there is no company with a massive stockpile of face masks, disinfecting wipes, toilet paper, and bleach waiting to ship you some if you provide them with your credit card number.
- While the Census Bureau is real, if you do not fill out the census yourself, no one is going to call you for answers. They will, however, knock on your door and present official identification. What they will NOT ask you for is your Social Security number.
- Do not donate to charities asking for money to help impacted by the coronavirus unless you can verify that it's a legitimate charity. Also, ask what percentage of your donation goes toward the cause and what percentage toward operating expenses of the organization itself. You might be surprised.

"We are living in a stressful time and unfortunately there are those who thrive on taking advantage of the situation," Beatty said. "If you are an 1180 retiree, please be extra careful now as spammers are out in full force. Call the Retiree Division if you need assistance."



To Learn More About COVID-19 Scams, Go To:

<https://www.fcc.gov/consumers>

<https://www.bbb.org/council/coronavirus/>

<https://www.bbb.org/ScamTracker>

