

## No Praise for Creative Scammers

Submitted by Judy Hart, Chair of the Informative and Protective Services Committee

Scammers make their e-mails look like legitimate companies that you deal with. They may pretend to be from a real estate agency, your utility company, or even your church. The scammer will ask you to wire payments to them. They get your information by hacking into the businesses that you trust.

- Never wire money to someone who emails, calls, or asks you for the money; instead check out the truth, but not with the scammer. Check it out with a phone call or email that you know.
- Do not open attachments from anyone unless you are expecting an e-mail with an attachment from him or her. Attachments are now the scammers' favorite source for installing ransomware on your computer.

If you've already wired money through your bank,

- Ask the bank immediately for a "wire recall."
- If you used Western Union or MoneyGram, call their complaint lines immediately.
- Report your complaint immediately to the FTC and FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center at <ic3.gov>. Give them every detail that you can. The more information you can give them and the sooner you can give it to them, the faster they can help you.
- If the bank requests a police report, give them a copy of your ic3.gov report.

[Tusan, Christina, Attorney for the Western Region of FTC. "Fake Emails Could Cost You Thousands." *Consumer Information*. May 16, 2017.]

Another creative scam alleges to consolidate your loans at a lower interest rates. The company purporting to be of non-profit status immediately debited the consumers' bank accounts for the initial payment and processing fees and then continued debiting the bank account months afterwards. The consumers found that their loans were not consolidated or paid off and that their credit scores was ruined instead of improved. [Dorman, Frank. "Massive Debt Relief Scam." FTC. May 15, 2017.]

Lisa Lake in "Scams in the Name of Charities" writes that some of the lowest scammers pretend to be from the Make-a-Wish Foundation. They claim that you've just won a sweepstakes, but you need to send a bundle of money to cover the taxes and insurance for the prize. Once you send in your money, you never hear from the company again. They may also call from the fictitious Consumer Protection Agency. Here's some techniques to know you are dealing with scammers:

- If they want you to wire money or give your bank account number over the phone, it's a scam.
- If you have to pay to get a prize, it's a scam.

[Lake, Lisa. "Scams in the Name of Charities." FTA. *Consumer Information*. July 6, 2017].

Irony of ironies, one scam has a new twist. A debt collector bought a portfolio of customers with past due debts. The company was to collect the debts and keep a certain percentage. The irony is that the list of customers with their contact information was accurate, but they owed no debts. They cried foul by contacting the Consumer Trade Commission. Be wary of debt collectors collecting on fictitious debts. They can be threatening. Even after they discovered that the "debtors" were not "debtors," they still tried to collect for the phantom debts. [Fair, Lesley. "Debt-erring Phantom Debt Collection." FTC. July 6, 2017.]

