

July 2020 Security Newsletter

Scammers Use COVID-19 to Get Your Attention

Whenever there is something new in the news, you can bet scammers and fraudsters will use that news to try to steal your money.

When the COVID-19 virus hit, scams related to the virus spread as fast as the virus itself.

Some scammers are using phone calls or text messages to contact potential victims. Others are using email. Some have created fake Face Book pages and private messaging to reach victims. Thieves use all the communications methods of today to try to reach you. Then, they will try to convince you to send them money.

Within weeks of the announcement of the existence of the COVID-19 virus, people began receiving phone calls asking for donations to help those who had gotten sick. Despite the information on the caller ID readouts, these calls were not from legitimate charities. Scammers know how to “spoof” the caller ID information to make them look as if they are honest organizations. These calls were coming from con men trying to convince you they were sincere in wanting to help others. What they really wanted was to help themselves to your money.

In the first week of March 2020, the Federal Trade Commission, and the Food & Drug Administration, sent letters to seven real businesses ordering them to stop promoting products for sale which those businesses claimed could treat or prevent the COVID-19 virus. Two weeks later the New York Attorney General issued a “cease and desist letter,” to radio host Alex Jones to stop advertising special toothpaste, mouthwash, creams, and dietary supplements which Jones claimed would kill all the SARS-corona family” of viruses.

Scammers are calling or emailing Americans telling them they are eligible for government grants. Some of these fake grants are reported to be as high as \$150,000.00. Some are said to help people pay medical bills. Some are supposed to be like “unemployment” payments, helping those laid-off from their jobs due to social distancing. These scammers use official sounding names like the “US Emergency Grants Administration.” They will ask to qualify by providing your name, social security number, birthday, and other information. They will ask you to send a processing fee.

The government will be issuing checks to Americans to help those economically impacted by the virus and stay-at-home orders. You can bet scammers will be making calls to Americans saying they will have to pay a fee, using iTunes cards, Green Dot cards, or other gift-type cards, to receive their checks. These lying fraudsters sound sincere and are persuasive. Other scammers will produce counterfeit government checks and try to pass them at banks and other financial institutions.

If you want to help agencies help victims, look for them yourself. Do your own research to keep informed on what is going on. If somebody is asking you to give them money, for any reason, be suspicious and ask questions.

Do not give money to someone who you don't know just because they called you. Never give money to someone who initiates a conversation via text. The government will never ask you to pay a processing fee for any benefits. They government will never ask you to send money via gift cards.