

# CHULA VISTA POLICE DEPARTMENT

## Senior Safety



### Tips for Older Americans

Senior citizens are often the targets of frauds and scams. They are targeted for fraud for several reasons:

- Often Senior Citizens have a "nest egg" which they've spent a life time saving.
- Seniors most likely own their home.
- Seniors most likely have excellent credit.

Seniors are less likely to report a fraud because they don't know who to report it to, are too ashamed of having been scammed, or don't know they've been scammed.

**All of these are attractive features to the con artist.**

**The first thing to remember and to always bear in mind; anything that sounds too good to be true, probably is.**

#### Unwanted Phone Solicitation

**If you receive a telephone call from someone telling you you've won a prize-** and they ask for payment for processing or administrative fees, customs, taxes, or any other reason, **it's probably a scam** because legitimate sweepstakes or prize offers don't ask for payment because it's illegal.

**If a caller requests your monetary support** - then refuses to send you written information about the project, company, or agency **it's probably a scam** because legitimate companies are always glad to send information about what they are offering.

**If a caller claims** - you can make huge profits in an investment with no risk, **it's probably a scam** because all investments are risky and legitimate companies must tell consumers about the possible risks involved.

**If a caller claims-** you can make huge profits through a franchise or other business opportunity with little or no effort, **it's probably a scam**, because all business ventures require knowledge and effort on the part of buyers, and no legitimate companies would guarantee profits.

**If a caller asks for a donation** - but won't tell you exactly how the money will be used and



how to verify the charity and what it does, **it's probably a scam**, because legitimate charities are willing to say what percentage of contributions are used for services and how much goes to overhead and fundraising. They're also willing to tell consumers who to call to confirm that the charity is legitimate.

If you decide to donate to any charities; contact the organization you wish to donate to and take care of it that way. Pay by check and make it payable to the organization, never an individual. Later if contacted by solicitors, tell callers you've done all your charitable giving for the year.

**If a caller makes a claim** -that your relative is ill, or has been mugged, or robbed and is now stranded in another Country and needs money from you to assist with plane or hotel fare, please contact your relative, or other family members, you'll most likely learn your relative is fine.

**If a caller asks** - for your social security number, your birth date, bank account numbers, credit card numbers, mother's maiden name, passwords or other personal identifying information for purposes of claiming a prize – do not give that information out.

**If a caller calls you relentlessly** - and won't take "no" for an answer, it's likely a con artist whose goal is to keep calling to wear you down or get more money from you. Hang up and tell the caller to stop calling. Call the police if they still persist.

**If a caller offers to get you a loan, or credit, or a credit card** - to "repair any bad credit if you pay an up-front fee, **it's probably a scam**. Be careful about any offer to combine all your bills. A debt consolidation loan may offer a low monthly payment, but the interest rates may be extremely high. Hundreds of people fall victim to this scam and lose their money and get no improvement to their credit history or score.

## **Con Artist Schemes**

Con games are schemes perpetuated by confidence artists. They often see older Americans as easy targets and use their charm and persuasive powers to separate the victim from his or her money.

**If a person says you have to take the offer immediately or you'll miss the opportunity- it's probably a scam** because legitimate companies don't pressure people to act without time to look into the deal.

The following are four of the more frequent schemes used by con artists:

### **The Pigeon Drop**

The victim is approached by a stranger and engaged in a conversation. When the con artist has gained the victim's confidence, he/she mentions a large amount of money that they or an acquaintance has found. A second person joins the stranger and they discuss that whoever lost the money probably came by it unlawfully.

One of the con artists indicates he/she works in the area and decides to contact his/her employer for "advice." He/she returns in a few minutes and states that his/her employer has counted the money and verified the amount and said they should keep and divide the money three ways. They are then instructed to each put up "good faith" money to show evidence of financial responsibility and good faith before collecting a share. The victim is then induced to withdraw his/her share from their bank and the con artist takes the money to his/her "employer." The con artist then disappears and the "employer" cannot be found.

### **The Bank Examiner**

A phony bank or saving and loan "investigator" contacts the victim and asks for his/her help in catching a dishonest employee. The victim is asked to go to their bank, make a cash withdrawal and then turn the money over to the bank examiner who will verify the serial numbers and catch the suspected employee. When the money is turned over to the phony bank examiner or "investigator," he or she disappears with it.

### **Lottery Ticket Scam**

A con artist will approach an individual and explain they have purchased a winning lottery ticket but cannot collect the lottery prize because he/she is an illegal alien. The victim is offered the winning lottery ticket for a substantial sum of cash. The con artist may call an accomplice and pretend to be calling the Lottery Commission to verify the winning number. After giving the victim the "winning" lottery ticket in exchange for cash, the con artist disappears.

Con artists using this scheme may target someone from their country or religion hoping the potential victim will be more trusting if they have something in common.

### **Home Improvement Schemes**

Popular home improvement schemes to beware of include roofing, driveway repair, porches, plumbing repairs and wiring. Beware of anyone offering a "free inspection" or survey. Do business with local firms you are acquainted with.

#### **After offering the free home inspections:**

- They may demand large down payments or deposits for home repairs and then disappear with the money.
- They may distract the homeowner and subsequently burglarize the home.
- They may quote a low price for home repairs and then inflate it dramatically after the work has begun.
- They may trick senior citizens into signing home improvement loan contracts, using their homes as collateral.

### **General Con and Fraud Recommendations**

- Read and understand any contract before you sign it. Don't skip the small print and **never** sign a blank contract or one with blanks to be filled in later.
- Beware of medical cures (drugs, eyeglasses, hearing aids, cures for arthritis and

cancer and other remedies) that may be ordered through the mail. See your doctor for health problems.

- Do not send money in for mail order insurance until your attorney has checked out the offer. Buy insurance from someone you trust. Buy only what you really want, need and can afford.
- Never purchase property you have not seen. Have your attorney check out the property and the seller.
- Avoid get-rich-quick schemes.
- Be totally aware of what people are saying. Do not be rushed into anything. Ask questions.
- Carefully review bills you may receive after the death of your spouse or loved one. Loss through death sometimes clouds our judgment and makes us vulnerable to phony bills, which may suddenly come to light.
- Obtain a receipt for all transactions.