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Sheriff's Office Reminds Citizens to Be Aware of Scams

Franklin County, VA - Unfortunately there are always people out there who are waiting to take advantage of others for personal profit. Scams are not new but there are new ways created for scamming innocent people every day. Scams can appear in the form of a phone call, a letter, an email, and many other varieties. Just a couple of weeks ago most of us made sure we filed our income tax paperwork by April 15th to avoid penalties for missing the IRS tax deadline. Now scammers are making phone calls, posing as tax officials, trying to steal from those hardworking citizens. There have also been recent reports of scammers calling citizens stating they have won lottery money. The scammer will give a number to call that appears to be a legitimate Wells Fargo or other financial institution's phone number. The call is automated but requires the victim to enter an account number to transfer the winnings to. The problem is that the scammer will not be putting money in, but taking money out. Another scam that has been around for a while but seems to still be claiming victims is when the scammer calls and claims to be a loved one that has been locked up in jail. The call is often muffled or the caller chooses an elderly victim. They request green dot cards to pay to get them out of jail. Once the victim gives the card numbers to the scammer, the money is gone.

Don't become a victim of a scam. Contact the Franklin County Sheriff's Office and speak with a deputy before you send your money or give out your information if a deal seems too good to be true. The Federal Trade Commission recommends 10 steps to avoid becoming the victim of a scam:

1. **Spot imposters.** Scammers often pretend to be someone you trust, like a government official, a family member, a charity, or a company you do business with. Don't send money or give out personal information in response to an unexpected request — whether it comes as a text, a phone call, or an email.
2. **Do online searches.** Type a company or product name into your favorite search engine with words like “review,” “complaint” or “scam.” Or search for a phrase that describes your situation, like “IRS call.” You can even search for phone numbers to see if other people have reported them as scams.
3. **Don't believe your caller ID.** Technology makes it easy for scammers to fake caller ID information, so the name and number you see aren't always real. If someone calls asking for money or personal information, hang up. If you think the caller might be telling the truth, call back to a number you know is genuine.
4. **Don't pay upfront for a promise.** Someone might ask you to pay in advance for things like debt relief, credit and loan offers, mortgage assistance, or a job. They might even say you've won a prize, but first you have to pay taxes or fees. If you do, they will probably take the money and disappear.
5. **Consider how you pay.** Credit cards have significant fraud protection built in, but some payment methods don't. Wiring money through services like Western Union or MoneyGram is **risky** because it's nearly impossible to get your money back. That's also true for reloadable cards like MoneyPak, Reloadit or Vanilla. Government offices and honest companies won't require you to use these payment methods.
6. **Talk to someone.** Before you give up your money or personal information, talk to someone you trust. Con artists want you to make decisions in a hurry. They might even threaten you. Slow down, check out the story, do an online search, consult an expert — or just tell a friend.
7. **Hang up on robocalls.** If you answer the phone and hear a recorded sales pitch, hang up and report it to the FTC. These calls are illegal, and often the products are bogus. Don't press 1 to speak to a person or to be taken off the list. That could lead to more calls.
8. **Be skeptical about free trial offers.** Some companies use free trials to sign you up for products and bill you every month until you cancel. Before you agree to a free trial, research the company and read the cancellation policy. And always review your monthly statements for charges you don't recognize.
9. **Don't deposit a check and wire money back.** By law, banks must make funds from deposited checks available within days, but uncovering a fake check can take weeks. If a check you deposit turns out to be a fake, you're responsible for repaying the bank.
10. **Sign up for free scam alerts from the FTC at ftc.gov/scams.** Get the latest tips and advice about scams sent right to your inbox.