

Intimidation Scams



The Office of the
Minnesota Attorney General
helping people afford their lives and live with dignity and respect

Some criminals use aggressive intimidation and scare tactics to perpetrate scams. These criminals will say almost anything to try to intimidate people—including threatening arrest, lawsuits, imprisonment, and physical harm. While the scams take several different forms, the goal is the same—to pressure people into providing money or personal and financial information. Below are a few examples:

Tax Scams

“Cindy” received a call from someone who identified himself as an IRS agent. The “agent” told Cindy that she owed \$5,000 in back taxes and that the IRS would file a lawsuit against her if she did not wire him the money by the end of the day. Cindy became suspicious because she knew that the IRS contacts people about such matters by U.S. Mail. She hung up and called her tax preparer, who confirmed the call was a scam. The individual repeatedly called Cindy for the next few days, but she did not answer, and the calls eventually stopped.

Jury Duty Scams

“Alan” received a call from a man who identified himself as a courthouse official and claimed that he missed jury duty. The man told Alan that he would be arrested unless he immediately paid a \$250 fine. When Alan told the individual that he did not receive a jury notice, the man asked for Alan’s Social Security number to check his records. Alan knew that jury duty assignments are based on government records, not Social Security numbers. He ended the call.

Phony Debt Collection Scams

“Phil” and his family members received calls from an individual who claimed he owed a \$750 debt. The individual demanded immediate payment, but refused to provide any information about his company or the debt. He told Phil that he would send the police to Phil’s home if the debt was not paid within 24 hours. Phil told his family to ignore future calls from the scam artist.

Utility Shut-off Scams

“George” received a call from a woman who purported to represent his utility company. The “representative” told George that he owed \$275 on his utility bill and asked him to send the money via a reloadable card. When George said that he wanted to check his account online, the woman told him that his electricity would be shut off unless he paid the bill immediately. George hung up and called his utility company at the telephone number on his most recent bill. His utility company confirmed that he was current on his payments and the call was a scam.

Imposter Scams

“Susan” received a call from an individual who purported to be her grandson. He told her that he was in jail in Mexico and needed her to wire money immediately to pay for bail. He asked her not to speak with his parents because he didn’t want to get into trouble and then handed the phone to his purported attorney. The fake “attorney” told Susan that her “grandson” would be sentenced to five years in prison if she did not wire \$2,500 for his bail that afternoon. After the call ended, Susan called her grandson’s mother and learned that the grandson was safe at home. When the scam artists called back, Susan did not answer their calls.

Advice for Avoiding Intimidation Scams

- Don't be intimidated into paying money you don't owe or disclosing your personal or financial information in the face of scare tactics.
- Don't be afraid to hang up if something doesn't seem right.
- Don't be rushed. The scam artists who perpetrate intimidation scams try to create a false sense of urgency to get people to act before they have time to think the situation through.
- When a caller claims to represent a specific company or agency, ask for his or her name and employee number. Then call the company or agency back using an independent and trusted source (not the number the scammer gives you).
- Don't send money via hard-to-track methods, such as wire transfer, overnight delivery, or reloadable cards, unless you are absolutely certain that you are sending money to a real friend or family member. Money sent by these hard-to-track methods is almost never recoverable.
- Information about people is commonly available online and elsewhere. Scam artists often use this information to legitimize their claims.

Report Intimidation Scams

If you believe that your well-being is threatened, call 911. You may also report intimidation scams to the Federal Bureau of Investigation as follows:

Federal Bureau of Investigation

Minneapolis Office
1501 Freeway Boulevard
Brooklyn Center, MN 55430
(763) 569-8000
www.fbi.gov

You may also wish to file a report with the Federal Trade Commission as follows:

Federal Trade Commission

Consumer Response Center
600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20580
(877) 382-4357
TTY: (866) 653-4261
www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov

For additional information, contact the Office of Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison as follows:

Office of Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison

445 Minnesota Street, Suite 1400
St. Paul, MN 55101
(651) 296-3353 (Twin Cities Calling Area)
(800) 657-3787 (Outside the Twin Cities)
(800) 627-3529 (Minnesota Relay)
www.ag.state.mn.us