



Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office

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News Release

Sheriff's Office Warns of Numerous Active Phone Scams

Santa Barbara – The Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office wants to warn residents that we are receiving a large number of reports of various yet familiar phone scams. These scammers are going to great lengths right now to trick anyone and everyone they can into giving them money. Please be careful. Just in the past 24-hours, Santa Barbara County Public Safety Dispatchers have received reports of a Virtual Kidnapping scam and several reports of the Southern California Edison (SCE) scam. In that particular scam, the caller claims to be from SCE and threatens to shut off the resident's electricity if a payment is not received over the phone. We also have received numerous reports of a scam where the caller poses as an actual Sheriff's deputy, even using the name of a Lieutenant currently employed by the Sheriff's Office. In that scam, the caller tells the resident that there is a bench warrant issued for their arrest because they did not show up for jury duty. Dispatchers also are receiving reports about cyber-tech scammers who claim they can fix or upgrade your computer software if you give them your financial information.

The virtual kidnapping scam is one of the most alarming phone scams that we see. In this particular scam, the caller claims to have kidnapped a family member or friend and demands a ransom payment for their release. While no actual kidnapping has taken place, the callers often use co-conspirators to convince their victims of the legitimacy of the threat. For example, a caller might attempt to convince a victim that his daughter was kidnapped by having a young female scream for help in the background during the call. They will typically provide the victim with specific instructions to ensure the safe "return" of the alleged kidnapped individual. Most schemes use various techniques to instill a sense of fear, panic, and urgency in an effort to rush the victim into making a very hasty decision. The Sheriff's Office wants to remind the public that these are scams and if you receive a phone call from someone demanding a ransom for an alleged kidnap victim and you suspect it is a scam, hang up the phone, immediately contact family members and notify law enforcement. If you receive a virtual kidnapping call, please report it to the FBI PAL line at 310-477-6565.

We do not want to see any of our residents become a victim of these cowardly scams and urge you to **never give your personal or financial information out over the phone**. If you receive any phone call where you are being asked for money or identifying information, you should immediately hang up and call the Sheriff's Office or any other agency where the caller claims to be calling from to verify the information. Do not be fooled by your caller identification, even if it appears that the number is coming from the Sheriff's Office or an 805 area code. Technology makes it easy for scammers to fake caller ID information. The Sheriff's Office wants to

remind residents that our agency does not call residents over the phone to notify them of a warrant nor do we take any payments of any kind over the phone.

To report phone scams, call the Federal Trade Commission at 1-877-FTC-HELP or visit www.ftc.gov/complaint. You can also report a scam by calling the Santa Barbara County District Attorney's Fraud Hotline at 805-568-2442.

For IRS phone scam complaints, please call the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration at 800-366-4484 or use their IRS Impersonation Scam Reporting web page at www.treasury.gov/tigta/contact_report_scam.shtml.

You can file a report with the FBI website at www.ic3.gov.