

OFFICE OF THE
DISTRICT ATTORNEY
COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

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District Attorney



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RELEASE DATE

APPROVED BY *Joyce E. Dudley*
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***** PRESS RELEASE *****

May 7, 2013

District Attorney Joyce E. Dudley announced today that on Friday, May 3, 2013, 28-year-old Imoukhuede Ehimika pled to 17 felony counts of identity theft, 4 other felony offenses including grand theft, commercial burglary, and money laundering, and a special allegation of causing losses exceeding \$200,000.

According to prosecuting Attorney Anthony Davis, beginning in late 2009, Ehimika took part in an elaborate scheme to defraud victims of their personal identifying information and ultimately their money. This fraudulent activity lasted through the end of 2010 when he was finally caught. Ehimika would receive basic bank information from an out-of-state source, related to bank customers residing in Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties, specifically those who had a home equity line of credit (HELOC) with their bank. Ehimika would then take that basic information, go to the homes of the unsuspecting victims, steal personal mail from their mailboxes, and access the victims' personal computers through unsecured wireless networks, all for the purpose of obtaining social security numbers, birth dates, driver's license numbers, and other pieces of personal identifying information.

Ehimika took the stolen personal identifying information and set up fraudulent checking accounts in the name of each victim, tying them directly to each victim's HELOC, complete with debit cards and checks. This was accomplished either online or over the phone. Ehimika then funded the fake checking accounts by transferring huge sums of money from the HELOCs. He used the fraudulent debit cards to purchase large money orders at Southern California Wal-Mart stores, which were then sent back to the out-of-state source of the original basic banking information. Ehimika also used the debit cards to pay for some of his own personal expenses.

The fraudulent scheme was uncovered when one of the victims of identity theft contacted his bank regarding suspicious activity on his HELOC account. That victim ultimately contacted the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department. An extensive investigation by Sheriff's detectives led to the discovery of numerous other victims, with thousands more pieces of personal information (mail, financial documents, and handwritten notes) recovered from Ehimika's residence. Ehimika was arrested in December 2010, and subsequently charged with 67 counts of identity theft, grand theft, forgery, commercial burglary, money laundering, and an enhancement for causing losses in excess of \$200,000. Per the plea agreement, Ehimika is scheduled to be sentenced later this year to 5 years and 8 months, along with an order to pay restitution of roughly \$160,000.

The District Attorney's Office commends the detectives of the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department for their detailed and thorough investigation, leading to the closure of dozens of fraudulent accounts, the recovery of tens of thousands of dollars, and ultimately the successful prosecution of Ehimika for the crimes he committed against the numerous victims of our community.

In response to this case D.A. Dudley stated, "Let this be another reminder to everyone in our community to continue to be vigilant in protecting your identity and to report any suspicious activity to law enforcement."

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