



SCAM ALERT!

Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office
Sheriff Larry Ashley



“Scams cost elderly and family members millions”

Okaloosa County residents kept the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office and the Sheriff's Office Fraud Hotline busy in 2011 as reports of various frauds and scams were reported to law enforcement. Despite numerous warnings given to consumers about scammers who prey on unsuspecting seniors, sympathetic homeowners, cell phone users and credit card holders; hundreds of thousands of dollars continue to be swindled from trustworthy and innocent victims.

Below are a just a few scams that continue to plague our area:

- **Door to Door Magazine Solicitation** - Many of these companies employ crews of high school and college students who are trying to earn a little extra cash. These crews are sent to communities to knock on doors and sell magazines—most often without appropriate licensing. In the sales pitch, the representative might explain they are working to help get their lives back on track, raising money on behalf of a charity or for a school trip or even selling subscriptions to support troops in Iraq. In the State of Florida, door to door sales are **ILLEGAL** without a county permit. The sales representative **must** have in their possession a picture ID with a permit number, expiration date, name, date of birth, address, race, sex, signature, and phone number of the clerk of court in which the permit was obtained. Do not let high pressure sales tactics or sob stories persuade you to part with your money. If you have a door to door sales representative show up at your home, contact the Sheriff's Office at (850) 651-7400 immediately.
- **Internet scams** targeting employment and home/vacation rentals are running rampant. If you are looking for a job online, looking to rent a home or offering your home for rent or sale, beware of scammers who offer to pay more than what you are asking or send a check and ask you to wire “excess” money via Western Union or Moneygram. Make sure you confirm the property you are renting is truly available!
- **Phishing Text Messages or Voice Mails** – Scammers will text message or leave a voice mail telling you that your bank or credit card account has been compromised. If you are instructed to return a phone call, enter your card or bank account number into your phone, **DON'T!** Doing so will give the bad guy your account information; call your account holder to confirm.
- **Sweepstakes/Lottery Scam** – This particular scam is generally targeted at our seniors and has literally robbed some of our residents of their life savings. No legitimate sweepstakes or lottery will ask you to pay money up front in order to collect your winnings. **NEVER** wire money to someone you do not know. If you have been a victim of a sweepstakes/lottery scam or know someone who has, contact the **Sheriff's Office Fraud Hotline at 850-651-7674.**

These scams and others like it are taking a large toll on our seniors not only financially, but emotionally and physically as well. These brazen con artists are raking in millions and millions of dollars from our neighbors, friends and family members. The best way you can avoid becoming a victim is to read all letters and e-mails thoroughly and then throw away or delete false claims and scams, remember you control your finances – if a deal sounds too good to be true, it is most likely false and finally, think realistically and don't react to anyone who tells you they need your urgent response to close the deal. If you have been a victim of a scam or fraud or want information on how to protect a loved one who is being victimized, please **contact the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office:**

CASE
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Fraud Hotline at 850-651-7674