

Grandparents Scam

Syracuse (WSYR-TV)

- The Syracuse Police Department is warning retirees and senior citizens about a grandparent telephone scam that has been affecting Central New Yorkers and other communities across the United States.

Several reports and complaints filed with the Syracuse Police Department indicate that seniors have been receiving telephone calls from a purported grandchild in need of emergency cash.

Police say the suspect usually begins with the caller telling the victim “Hey, it’s your favorite grandson.” The caller’s goal is to learn the name of a recipient’s actual grandchild. Sometimes the caller has learned the name of the grandchildren in advance and claims to be a grandchild during the call.

The grandparent receives a distressed phone call from someone pretending to be his or her grandchild. The supposed grandchild caller explains that he or she is traveling in Canada, has been involved in an accident, was arrested, is stranded or in similar trouble and needs money immediately. The ‘grandchild’ also insists that the victim not tell anyone else — which increases the odds that the fraud will be successful. The con artist pleads with the grandparent to wire money to post bail or pay for damages, usually amounting to a few thousand dollars. By the time the elderly call recipient realizes what happened, the money is long gone.

One Syracuse resident and grandparent who contacted the Syracuse Police

Department had wired over \$65,000 to someone she believed was her grandson, supposedly to bail him out of jail. Upon contacting the grandson later, the woman learned she had been scammed and reported the incident.

The money was wired to an unknown location in Ontario, Canada via Western Union and Money Gram.

The scam's not a new one, but it has developed in sophistication over the years.

Scammers used to randomly call the elderly and cunningly “phish” for useful information by asking the call taker to guess which grandchild they are and what kind of trouble they're in. If the con artist was lucky, talented or both, he could be convincing enough to have the grandparents wire money by the thousands in a hurry.

These days, scammers don't have to “phish” for authenticating facts through phone conversations. Information needed to validate their false identity can be easily found on Internet family blogs, genealogy sites and social engineering sites.

Syracuse Police are not certain how perpetrators are obtaining phone numbers for so many senior citizens in Central New York, and across the United States. In this particular scam, the con artist’s basic tactic is to pose as a grandchild and let the unsuspecting grandparent fill in the blanks.

The Syracuse Police Department offers these tips to protect yourself from this scam and others that may use a distressed loved one tactic:

1. It is strongly advised that seniors or any other persons receiving such requests are asked to confirm the status of their loved one by calling them directly or verifying the story with other family members before taking any further action.
2. Persons who receive these calls should always exercise some skepticism when they receive telephone calls urgently requesting money. If a relative calls and asks for money, they should verify the identity of the caller with personal questions a stranger would not be able to answer.
3. Any request to wire money through Western Union or MoneyGram should be seen as a red flag and an immediate tip-off that the call may be part of a scam, as these two money wire services have been prevalently used by the scammers as the means by which to obtain the money. Funds sent via wire transfer are hard to track once received by con artists and are usually not recoverable by law enforcement or banking officials.

Reports can also be filed online through [the PhoneBusters site](#), or by phone at 1-888-495-8501.

The Better Business Bureau first reported of this distressing telephone scam in October of 2008, around the time that the Syracuse Police Department received its first complaints.