

NEWS FROM SCDCA

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

Carri Grube Lybarker, Administrator



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Contact: Juliana Harris, (803) 734-4296

Scammers Target SC Consumers for \$1.2 Million since November 2014:

More than \$200,000 lost to relationship scams

COLUMBIA, S.C. – Over the last six months, SCDCA’s Identity Theft Unit has received 1,190 scam reports where fraudsters sought \$1.2 million from SC consumers. Of that amount, \$624,817 was actually given to scammers. Relationship scams, of which SCDCA received 10 reports, accounted for \$203,000 of these scam losses.

Nationwide over \$800 million was lost to online scams just last year according to the FBI’s Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) 2014 Internet Crime Report. Relationship scams resulted in the most money lost, with complainants defrauded out of over \$86 million through this type of scam.

Relationship scammers usually establish fake dating profiles with the intention of extorting money. The fraudsters pretend to be someone out of the country on a religious mission, military deployment or business. Victims are asked for money to pay travel expenses, medical bills or other costs. Many victims only realize the relationship was a scam after losing substantial sums of money.

It can be difficult to catch these sweetheart swindlers, so it is important to know the warning signs of this scam. Be suspicious of your online relationship if your admirer:

- Wants to immediately leave the dating site and insists on using personal email or instant message (IM);
- Asks for money, especially if by wire transfer or prepaid card;
- Declares love quickly;
- Claims to be from the United States, but is travelling or working abroad;
- Refuses to talk on the phone or meet in person;
- Plans to visit, but at the last minute cancels due to a traumatic event or a bad business deal;
- Frequently misspells words or uses improper grammar.

If you are a victim of a relationship scam, be sure to report it. You should contact the dating website through which you met the scammer and report the scam to SCDCA, the FTC, and IC3. To report a scam to SCDCA, call toll-free, 1-800-922-1594 or call 803-734-4200. To report to the FTC, visit ftc.gov/complaint or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357). To report to the IC3, visit www.ic3.gov and click file a complaint.

For additional information about this type of scam, see SCDCA’s Spotlight on dating scams, <http://www.consumer.sc.gov/Documents/SpotLight/DatingScams.pdf>.

About SCDCA

The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs aims to protect consumers from inequities in the marketplace through advocacy, complaint mediation, enforcement and education. To file a complaint or get information on consumer issues, visit www.consumer.sc.gov or call toll-free, 1-800-922-1594.

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