



Ramsey County Sheriff's Office

Bob Fletcher, Sheriff

Neighborhood Watch

Public Safety Services Division – Crime Prevention Unit

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Neighbors and Deputies working together for safer communities

Block Captain News – January 2021

Happy New Year!

The members of the Sheriff's Office are looking forward to a great year ahead with the hopes that we can put the challenges of the previous year in the rearview mirror. We learned a lot about resiliency this past year as the world dealt with the pandemic and the impact felt in our individual lives and our communities. While true that we don't know exactly when the pandemic will end and what our normal will look like when it does, we are hopeful that our isolation will end and we can interact in face to face contact with others in our community.

Our hope in the Crime Prevention Unit is that we will be able to resume our in-person block captain meetings, Coffee with a Cop, community events, Night to Unite and more. Stay tuned and we'll all get together in our new normal 2021, where the mission is making our communities more safe.

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New tools introduced to fight gift card scams.

Year-round, gift cards are on scammers' wish lists. Scammers always have a reason for you to pay them immediately with a gift card. And they often tell you which card to buy and which store to visit. That's why the FTC launched a new Stop Gift Card Scams campaign to work with stores and law enforcement to fight these scams.

At ftc.gov/StopGiftCardScams, you can find materials to help people avoid gift card scams. If you're a retailer (or even if you visit one), you can download, print, and share these materials in your store and community. You'll find a display rack sign, cashier infographic card, bookmark, and a sticker. Stop Gift Card Scams is also available in Spanish.

This is pressing because the FTC's data show that, nationwide, gift cards are a top way that people report paying most scammers. People tell the FTC that, since 2018, they've paid almost \$245 million to scammers, with a median loss of \$840. In December, the FTC released an updated [Data Spotlight](#) with some interesting new developments:

- Reports suggest eBay is scammers' current gift card brand of choice. It was Google Play and iTunes, but eBay has claimed the uncoveted top spot
- People most often report using gift cards to pay scammers pretending to be the government, a business, tech support, or a friend or family member in trouble.
- People report that scammers tell them to buy gift cards at Walmart, Target, CVS, and Walgreens. And once they have you there, they'll keep you on the phone as you pay for the gift cards.

Which brings it full circle back to the Stop Gift Card Scams campaign. Read lots more in the [Spotlight](#) itself, and find out more about avoiding gift card scams at ftc.gov/giftcards. And if anyone, no matter who it is, tells you to pay with a gift card, that's a scam. Stop, don't pay, and then tell the FTC at ReportFraud.ftc.gov.



**Stop
Gift Card
Scams**



Skating on Thin Ice – more than just a ‘mom saying’

The 20-21 winter season has been ‘interesting’ as we started with snow and cold for Halloween; near tropical conditions for deer season and Thanksgiving; brown lawns and smooth ice without snow in December; a blizzardly white Christmas; and warm weather conditions providing questionable ice conditions on our area lakes and ponds as we start the new year.

During the Christmas-News Years holiday period multiple reports of vehicles and people breaking thru the ice were received throughout Minnesota.

Safety first

The recommended minimum thickness for walking on new, clear ice is 4 inches. Wait for 5 to 7 inches before heading out on an ATV or snowmobile and keep cars off until there’s 8 to 12 inches. Anyone planning to drive out in a truck, should wait until there’s at least 12 to 15 inches of ice. Double these minimums for white or snow-covered ice.

• Wear a life jacket or float coat on the ice (except when in a vehicle).

• Carry ice picks, rope, an ice chisel and tape measure.

• Check ice thickness at regular intervals; conditions can change quickly.

• Bring a cell phone or personal locator beacon.

• Don’t go out alone; tell someone about trip plans and expected return time.

• Before heading out, inquire about conditions and known hazards with local experts.



If you see someone fall through, remain calm and call 911. Do not attempt a rescue unless there is a means of self-rescue. Throw the person any piece of buoyant gear available, as well as a rope, jumper cables or other object to pull them out of the water or away from thin ice. Let go if they start pulling you toward dangerous ice.

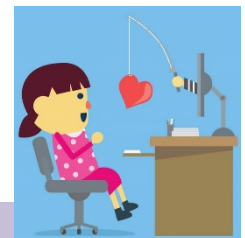
February holiday preview – with a word of caution

The month of February is host to a day to recognize romance and those that are special in our hearts. Valentine’s Day is appreciated by our neighborhood florists, chocolatiers, card makers, apothecaries and for some, a time of commitment anxiety.

Many have profiles on online dating sites, apps or social media to find “the one.”

Please exercise caution with that interesting person who just messaged you – it could be a sweet-talking romance scammer looking for your cash.

Please remember it’s not true love if they ask for money.



Signs of a Scam

-  Professes love quickly. Claims to be overseas for business or military service.
-  Asks for money, and lures you off the dating site.
-  Claims to need money — for emergencies, hospital bills, or travel. Plans to visit, but can’t because of an emergency.

What to do

- 1 Slow down** — and talk to someone you trust. Don’t let a scammer rush you.
- 2 Never transfer money** from your bank account, buy gift cards, or wire money to an online love interest. You won’t get it back.
- 3 Contact your bank right away** if you think you’ve sent money to a scammer.
- 4 Report your experience to:**
 - The online dating site
 - Federal Trade Commission: [ftc.gov/complaint](https://www.ftc.gov/complaint)
 - Federal Bureau of Investigation: [ic3.gov](https://www.ic3.gov)

What's trending? Investment Coaching & Income Scams

"You'll make a lot of money. It's easy to do right from your own home. I'm going to show you how to do it – and using my program and system I guarantee your success!"

When you see these claims in an ad – there's likely a scammer behind it. In mid-December the Federal Trade Commission joined federal, state and local government partners to roll out "Operation Income Illusion", an effort to fight income scams and help people recognize and avoid them. With record unemployment and the ongoing financial impact of the pandemic, many people are looking to make ends meet — and scammers are pitching income scams with false promises of success and financial security.

In a typical pitch, scammers will say that you can make a lot of money, for example, working from home with little time and effort, or starting your own online business. But those promises of big money are all an income illusion. In fact, in the first nine months of 2020 alone, people reported to the FTC that they lost at least \$150 million. The total amount of alleged injury for the FTC income scam cases is over \$1 billion. Income scams hit people hard.

Sometimes these scammers focus their pitches on particular communities, reinforcing that people in every community need to be on the alert for income scams. In one case, a work-from-home scam targeted Latinas through Spanish language TV ads. In another case, an alleged investment scam affected older adults, retirees, and immigrants. And in yet another case, the FTC found servicemembers, veterans, students, and college-age adults targeted with a business coaching scam.

When the FTC analyzed customer data from some of the cases, it was found that in income scams where the average loss was less than \$500, people who lost money were 44% more likely to live in majority Black communities.

You can spot income scams if you know the scammers' tactics.

Before you pay for a program that promises to help you invest your money, consider these things:

- **Statistics and testimonials can be faked.** Scammers want you to believe their program is always successful and low risk.
- **Scammers exaggerate the press of time.** They want you to feel pressured to commit now without doing research on the offer.
- **No one can guarantee a specific amount of return on an investment.** Scammers might claim that you can make thousands of dollars per day or per month for life, but no one can actually guarantee that an investment will be successful.

And if you know the signs of an income scam you can avoid it and help others avoid it, too. If you spot an income scam, report it at ReportFraud.ftc.gov.

Income Illusion Spot an income scam

Everyone can be targeted by income scams.
A business offer may say:

- Make money selling in your community. Be your own boss!
- Learn from the experts how to generate guaranteed income.
- You got the job! Deposit this check and send money or buy gift cards.
- Work from home and make money with little time and effort!
- Just recruit more people to make big money!

Before you accept a business offer:

- Take your time.
- Be skeptical about success stories and testimonials.
- Don't bank on a "cleared" check.
- Do your research.

► Learn more at ftc.gov/IncomeScams

FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION Report income scams at ReportFraud.ftc.gov

Tool to help drivers and cops during traffic stops

A traffic stop is often the first interaction that a citizen has with law enforcement. The officer doesn't know who you are beyond any information via the license plate. The first thing the officer is looking out for is his or her safety. A driver should turn off the car, roll down the window, stay inside the car and put their hands on the steering wheel, or at least make it clear that there is nothing in their hands and they are not reaching for anything. Never reach under your seat.

Always carry proper identification: a valid driver's license, current proof of insurance, and proof of vehicle registration in some states. Do not retrieve or reach for documentation until instructed.

To remedy the confusion on what documents are needed and how to provide them to a police officer during a routine traffic stop a South Carolina mother invented a pouch that mounts on a vehicle's air vent/dash to hold the documents in plain view. The pouch is available online at <https://www.notreaching.com> for \$10. It also is available with messaging for drivers who are deaf, autistic, or licensed to carry a firearm.

Remember: as with all valuables – do not leave this pouch and contents in your vehicle unattended.



Reminder: don't leave your vehicle running, unlocked and unattended. Don't make it easy for thieves to drive it away while you're "away for just a moment". Spread the word. Stop thefts.

Neighborhood Watch is about Neighbors and Deputies working together

Involved neighbors are more likely to have open communication lines with each other, deputies, and the whole community. When neighbors know each other's names, normal patterns, and look out for each other, it is likely that they will report any activity that doesn't fit with regular schedules. Involved neighbors look out for each other.

Information sharing on crime prevention, crime trends, and law enforcement issues is a key element to the Neighborhood Watch program of the Sheriff's Office.

Neighborhood Watch program [information and forms](#) to help your block organization are available on the county [website](#). **Please complete and return** the [Block Captain registration form](#) to ensure the Sheriff's Office has your most current contact information. THANKS!



Thank you for working for safer neighborhoods!



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Remember – when you See Something, Say Something, Call 9-1-1