



Los Angeles County
Sheriff's Department
Leroy D. Baca, Sheriff

A Victim's Guide To Fraud



*Always remember "If it sounds too good to be true,
IT PROBABLY IS!" and "You do NOT get
something for nothing!"*

Commercial Crimes Bureau
Fraud Detail
11515 S. Colima Road, M-104
Whittier, CA 90604
PHONE: (562) 946-7217
FAX: (323) 415-4422

Within this brochure you will find some examples of current frauds as well as important contacts for additional information and assistance.

Fraud is defined as "a deliberate deception practiced so as to secure unfair or unlawful gain".

The Fraud Unit investigates several types of frauds including embezzlement, fiduciary abuse of the elderly, pyramid scams, real estate fraud, advance fee scams, bunco scams, identity theft and major organized frauds. If you believe that you have been the victim of a fraud, contact your local sheriff's station or police department for assistance.

ENDLESS CHAIN SCAMS OR PYRAMID SCAMS

An endless chain or pyramid scam usually starts with a friend or family member telling you of a very easy way to get rich fast with little or no risk.

You are asked to join a group or organization by contributing a sum of money, usually \$2,000.00 to \$5,000.00. You are then asked to attend a seminar or meeting where your investment will be described to you. At the meeting, you are told all you have to do is recruit five additional members who each contribute the same amount of money as you. These new members then each recruit five more members who also contribute the same amount of money. As each recruitment occurs, you are told that you get a percentage of the contributions. The more people recruited, the more money you will receive.

In reality, the only people who get the money are those who are at the top, usually the organizers or suspects. Those towards the bottom get nothing.

PIGEON DROP SCAM OR LOTTO SCAM

In this type of scam, the suspects work in pairs. One befriends an unsuspecting citizen, the "pigeon," claiming to have either a large sum of money he just found or the winning Lotto ticket. He cannot go to a bank because he/she is an immigrant or another plausible sounding reason. As the first suspect is talking with the victim, the second suspect approaches and gets involved.

One of the suspects will go to phone and call a lawyer. The suspect returns and says they can keep the money and split it three ways but to get their share, all have to put up some "good faith" money. The second suspect shows he has his money with a roll of what appears to be cash.

Everyone agrees to get the money then meet at a designated place to divide the proceeds. The victim contributes his "good faith" money as well as the second suspect by putting the money into a bag. You are then given the bag to hold while the two suspects go to collect the money. Covertly a switch has been made, substituting worthless papers for the cash. You wait at the designated spot and after a length of time and no one has returned, you look in the bag and find only loose papers.



ADVANCE FEE SCAMS, ALSO LOTTERY SCAMS

In these types of frauds, you are contacted, usually by telephone, and told you have won a grand prize which is a very large sum of money.

To collect the winnings, you must pay the taxes/fees up front for the money to be sent to you.

The money you send is usually to a location out of State or another Country such as Canada or Africa. After a short period you are contacted again and told there were problems with the winnings and you must send additional money to collect your prize.

There is no prize and there was no money.

Although there are jurisdictional issues with this type of scam such as who investigates it, a victim should report the crime immediately to their local sheriff's station or police department.

IDENTITY THEFT

This is the fastest growing crime in the United States and will impact one out of every four people. It is an invisible crime that victims only discover when they receive a bill, collection notice or attempt to make a large purchase such as a car.

Once discovered, it can have devastating effects on one's credit. Fortunately, there have been many new laws passed, both Federal and State, to help consumers and victims of this type of crime.

Identity Theft is when a suspect gains access to your personal information and/or account number's, then assumes your identity and goes on a spending spree.

If you discover you have been the victim of Identity Theft, immediately contact your local Sheriff's Station who will report the crime and give you assistance with information on how to clear your credit.

FIDUCIARY ABUSE OF THE ELDERLY OR DEPENDANT ADULT

This type of crime usually involves a caretaker, an acquaintance or even a family member. It usually involves a victim who has a reduced mental capacity due to age, medical condition or physical defect.

The suspect gains control over the victim's financial assets through deceit, force, forgery of documents or threats.

Once in control, the suspect will usually drain the victim's accounts and transfer the assets to themselves.

California takes this crime very seriously and has enacted laws very specific to this type of crime. The Fraud Unit has investigators assigned specifically to this type of crime.

If you suspect any type of abuse against an elderly or dependant adult, contact your local sheriff's station or police department.

REAL ESTATE FRAUD

Real Estate Frauds can involve the unlawful transfer or forgery of titles or deeds, adverse possession of abandoned or vacant property and loan fraud.

The Fraud Unit has a team of detectives who specialize in investigating these types of crimes.

IMPORTANT NUMBERS AND CONTACTS

CREDIT BUREAUS

To report fraud:

EXPERIAN	1-888-397-3742
TRANS UNION	1-800-680-7289
EQUIFAX	1-800-525-6285

WEB SITES FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Federal Trade Commission
www.ftc.gov

United States Secret Service
www.secretservice.gov

California Department of Consumer Affairs
www.dca.ca.gov

Federal Bureau of Investigation
www.fbi.gov

U.S. Consumer Affairs – ID Theft
www.consumer.gov/idtheft/