



ERIK NASARENKO
VENTURA COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY
NEWS RELEASE



Follow us @VenturaCountyDA
vcdistrictattorney.com

Contact: Joey Buttitta
Title: Communications Manager/PIO
Phone: (805) 767-3400
Email: Joey.Buttitta@ventura.org

Approved: SW
Date: July 25, 2023
Release No.: 23-093

Text Messaging and Dating App Fraud Warning

VENTURA, Calif. – District Attorney Erik Nasarenko warns Ventura County residents to be aware of cellular texting and dating apps (applications) scams.

Electronic communications such as text messages received on your cell phone or through a dating app are now common forms of communication. Unfortunately, highly sophisticated criminals are exploiting the vulnerabilities of both electronic texts and dating apps to scam victims out of substantial sums of money.

There are several steps to these scams. First, the scammers identify and target individuals who have financial assets. They search social media and other public databases for personal information and then initiate contact through email, text message, telephone, or a social media app. The scammers then identify themselves by falsely using the identity of a respectable person such as a successful entrepreneur or doctor. Often, the scammer spends months communicating with the future victim to establish rapport.

Upon establishing credibility, the scammer entices the victim with an exclusive investment opportunity offering a large profit with little risk. For example, a thief impersonating a medical research doctor may tell the victim his company is launching a new cancer pharmaceutical drug. Believing the scammer, the future victim invests a relatively nominal amount of money (such as \$1,000) by wiring the funds to a false financial account controlled by the scammer.

Next, the scammer returns the initial investment with a substantial profit to the victim. After experiencing a successful investment, the victim again invests additional money, this time tens of thousands of dollars. The victim monitors their investment through a financial account.

Unbeknownst to the victim, this is a false account controlled by an organized crime group, which posts false account balances with increasing profits. Often, victims succumb to the belief that their investment is generating an extraordinary profit, which causes them to liquidate and invest all their

other assets such as their savings and retirement accounts, home equity, credit cards, and personal loans to obtain additional monies to send to the scammer.

Eventually, when the victim is ready to cash out and request their money, they never receive it. Despite many attempts to contact the scammer, the victim receives no response. At this point in time, the victim reports the theft to local law enforcement who usually determines the money was deposited into a bank located in a foreign country that does not comply with U.S. laws.

“Once the money is in the criminal’s bank account, it is extremely difficult to recover the victim’s funds,” said Ventura County District Attorney Investigator Michael Aguilar. “Consequently, time is extremely critical to follow and locate the money before it leaves the country. Reporting the fraud immediately to law enforcement offers the best chance for the victim to recover their money.”

Prevention from scams begins with being cautious when communicating with people you have never met and disclosing personal information. If a solicitor claims to represent a business or organization, independently search the internet for that entity’s website and then contact the organization through the published telephone number to verify the solicitor’s identity. Do not invest in haste. Be suspicious of promises of high returns. Take your time and consult with certified investment and financial experts, or someone you trust.

If you have lost money to a scam or believe you or someone else is a victim of a scam, immediately contact your local police or sheriff’s office. Additionally, the District Attorney’s Major Fraud Unit may be called for more information at (805) 662-1750.