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San Diegans Targeted by ‘Granny Scam’; DA Warns Seniors to Protect Themselves

82-year-old Woman Falls Victim to Scammer Posing as Grandson

San Diego County District Attorney [Bonnie M. Dumanis](#) today warned San Diegans about an ongoing scam targeting the elderly in which imposters pose as a grandchild in trouble and in need of cash. Since the first of the year, the DA’s Victim Assistance Division has noted an apparent increase in crime reports where elderly citizens have been targeted by criminals using the so-called “Grandma Scam.”

“This particular scam isn’t going away,” said DA Dumanis. “Elderly victims continue to be defrauded out of thousands of dollars. As part of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, our office is again warning seniors not to be fooled by these con artists and others who would steal their money.”

Law enforcement and the media have been aware of the [Grandma Scam](#) for years, but its popularity with criminals sees an occasional resurgence from time to time. In the past two years, at least 25 seniors fell victim to the Grandma Scam and lost a total of \$ 141,482, according to crime reports from the San Diego County Sheriff’s Department. In one recent case, a Carlsbad grandmother was victimized and wired \$120,000 to an account in China.

With the “grandparent scam” the caller pretends to be a grandchild in trouble in a foreign country who needs money immediately. The caller often says he’s been arrested, was in a car accident or had some type of medical emergency. The scam is often effective because it catches seniors off guard and tugs at their heartstrings. The caller always insists that the grandparent not tell anyone about the money transfer, which is one of the red flags.

Another recent case involves an 82-year-old San Diego woman who received a call from a man claiming to be her grandson. The caller said he was in a Mexican jail and needed money for bail. The grandmother wired \$2,900 via Western Union before she realized she had been duped.

“It is impossible to say how many other victims are out there because the majority of them never file police reports,” said Deputy District Attorney Paul Greenwood, a nationally-recognized elder abuse prosecutor.

(more)

“They are too embarrassed and would rather lose the money rather than run the risk of their family finding out. Because the suspects are in another country, it’s hard to track down, let alone prosecute these telephone con artists,” Greenwood said.

The way to fight back is to make sure your friends and family members don’t become victims. Explain how the scam works. Tell them to be suspicious of anyone who calls unexpectedly and wants them to wire money – especially to Mexico or Canada. Make sure they know the right thing to do is to call you or someone else in the family, even if they’re told to keep it a secret.

Since police departments and sheriff’s officials do not have the resources to investigate every incident, it is important for senior citizens and their families to be aware of common scams to stay safe. [The San Diego County Office of Aging and Independence Services](#) has an Adult Protective Services hotline for those who suspect any type of elder abuse. The phone number is 800-510-2020.

"We receive more than 1,000 elder abuse calls each month. More than one-third of those involve financial abuse," says Nick Macchione, Director, County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency. "HHS is proud to join with the District Attorney's Office to help people **avoid** being targets of scams or other abuse through HHS's Live Well, San Diego! Safety Initiative."

Victims of financial elder abuse lose an estimated \$2.9 billion nationwide, according to a [study](#) released this month by the MetLife Mature Market Institute. Most victims are between the ages of 80 and 90, live alone and require some level of help with healthcare or home maintenance.

To keep your finances safe from scams, consider these tips: sweepstakes and overseas lotteries are phony; screen your calls before answering; don’t be afraid to hang up on the perpetrator; don’t let emotions cause you to react immediately to a phone call, letter or email; always check with a professional adviser. When people have been scammed once, their phone numbers and information are sold to other tricksters. Consider changing your phone number to avoid an onslaught of predatory phone calls.

For organizations that cater to senior citizens, posters with slogans and the hotline phone number are available. Contact the District Attorney’s Office at 619-515-8654 for more information on how to obtain a poster to hang in your establishment. For more information on victim assistance, contact 619-531-4041.

[World Elder Abuse Awareness Day](#) (WEAAD) was launched in 2006 by the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse and the World Health Organization at the United Nations. The purpose of WEAAD is to provide an opportunity for communities around the world to promote a better understanding of abuse and neglect of older persons by raising awareness of the cultural, social, economic and demographic processes affecting elder abuse and neglect.

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