

Prince William County Police

CRIME ALERT



5/18/16

Virtual Kidnapping Scam

Recently the Police Department has received reports of “virtual kidnapping” scams. This means scammers will call your cell phone and try to extort money by claiming that a family member has been taken hostage.

In the scheme, individuals call claiming to have kidnapped a family member. While no actual kidnapping has taken place, the callers often use co-conspirators to convince their victims of the legitimacy of the threat. For example, a caller might attempt to convince a victim that his daughter was kidnapped by having a young female scream for help in the background during the call. Often the reason they are holding the alleged victim varies, but some of the most prominent scams involve car accidents, drug debts, gang assaults, or persons being smuggled across the border. In another example, a caller may attempt to convince a victim that her husband or son had gotten into a car accident with a member of a gang. The individual calling pretends to be a friend or relative of the gang member and tells the victim that their family member is seriously injured and needs to go to the hospital but that their friend will not allow them to go the hospital until he gets paid for the damages done to his vehicle. Victim telephone numbers appear to be dialed at random.

Callers will typically provide the victim with specific instructions to ensure safe return of the allegedly kidnapped individual. In some cases, these instructions involve demands of a ransom payment. Callers are ordered to stay on the phone until the money is wired, often to a third party in Puerto Rico. Most schemes use various techniques to instill a sense of fear, panic, and urgency in an effort to rush the victim into making a very hasty decision. Instructions usually require the ransom payment be made immediately and typically by wire transfer using companies such as Western Union. The requested ransom payments are for varied amounts, usually between \$600 to \$1,900. In addition, once a payment is made, the alleged kidnapers often claim the money was not received and tells the victims that they need to wire additional money. The perpetrators of this scam appear to be Hispanic males and often speak with a Spanish accent.

To avoid becoming a victim of this scheme, look for the following possible indicators:

- Incoming calls come from an outside area code with area codes (787), (939) and (856)
- Calls do not come from the kidnapped victim’s phone
- Callers go to great lengths to keep you on the phone
- Callers prevent you from calling or locating the “kidnapped” victim
- Ransom money is only accepted via wire transfer

NEXT PAGE

REPORT ALL SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY TO THE POLICE

Emergency: 911 * Non-Emergency: 703-792-6500 * Crime Prevention Unit 703-792-7270

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If you receive a phone call from someone who demands payment of a ransom for a kidnapped victim, the following should be considered:

- Try to slow the situation down. Request to speak to the victim directly. Ask, "How do I know my loved one is okay?"
- If they don't let you speak to the victim, ask them to describe the victim or describe the vehicle they drive, if applicable.
- Listen carefully to the voice of the kidnapped victim if they speak.
- Attempt to call, text, or contact the victim via social media. Request that the victim call back from his or her cell phone.
- While staying on the line with alleged kidnappers, try to call the alleged kidnap victim from another phone.
- To buy time, repeat the caller's request and tell them you are writing down the demand, or tell the caller you need time to get things moving.
- Don't directly challenge or argue with the caller. Keep your voice low and steady.
- Request the kidnapped victim call back from his/her cell phone.

If you believe you are the victim of this scam, call our Communications Bureau at 703 792 6500 to report it. If you believe your family member is victim of a real kidnapping, call 911 immediately. For more info: <https://www.fbi.gov/.../virtual-kidnapping-scam-on-the-rise-i...>

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