

Scam alert: Never give cash to anyone claiming to be a government agent

By Martin Lenkowsky
New Pelican Writer

“Stranger Danger” isn’t just for kids. It applies to everyone, and in this case, especially the senior population.

There’s a new scam in town, and it’s not just here; it’s happening everywhere. Criminals are impersonating agents from the Social Security Administration (SSA), requesting their victims meet them in person to hand over cash.

Special Agent Anthony Monaco of the SSA’s Office of the Inspector General (OIG), says such impostor scams are nothing new. But their tactics and business models change. “We see impostor scam trends,”

“Never exchange money or funds of any kind with an individual claiming to be a (government) agent.”

- Anthony Monaco, Social Security Administration

he said, adding these scams most commonly target the 60-plus generation.

“It aligns with the baby boomer generation. There’s a lot of wealth with this generation,” Monaco said. He describes the perpetrators as businessmen who

are not good people. Plus, he emphasizes, there are foreign and organized crime organizations behind many of these fraudulent schemes. The money is laundered and might be used for nefarious purposes. Some illegal monies might even be used to support terrorist organizations.

The bottom line is for people to be cautious and vigilant. “Don’t hand off cash to strangers,” Monaco said.

In a press release, the SSA warns the public that “agents will never ask for or collect money at your doorstep or in any in-person transaction. Be aware that any such requests are scams.

“Never exchange money or funds of any kind with an individual claiming to be a

(government) agent. This new fraud trend introduces an element of physical danger to scams that never existed before. They’re constantly shifting and evolving,” Monaco said. “What’s old is new and what’s new is old. It’s cyclical.”

Large urban areas with diverse populations have always been ripe for fraudulent activity. South Florida is no exception. “If it didn’t start in South Florida, it will end up there,” said Monaco.

Monaco points out scam victims have ranged in age from 23 to 99. The average victim is 73.

Also warning the public and, in particular, its members, is the Area Agency on Aging of Broward

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County (AAABC).

“There are so many individuals being scammed these days and seniors are always vulnerable,” said AAABC CEO Charlotte Mather-Taylor. “We try to get this out through social media and news releases.”

“A lot of people are too trusting, especially those with declining mental faculties. It’s frightening how many scammers there are.” She says if people are suspicious they can call the agency’s helpline at 954-745-9779.

Not all victims want to admit publicly they’ve been scammed. “You read stories a lot of times when people do get scammed, they’re embarrassed,” Mather-Taylor said. “Like, what were you thinking?”

The SSA OIG is also trying to get the word out. Rebecca Rose, press officer for SSA OIG, says

they are informing the public through a wide array of platforms and channels, including AARP, Walmart, financial institutions, other law enforcement agencies, and public service broadcasts.

What to do if you’ve been scammed: If you’ve been targeted by these scammers, take immediate action.

Stop all communication with the scammer. Notify financial institutions and safeguard your accounts.

Contact the police and file a report.

File a complaint with the FBI Internet Crime Complaint Center.

Report Social Security-related scams to SSA OIG.

Report other scams to the Federal Trade Commission.

Keep a record of all financial transaction information and communications with the scammer.



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