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SCAMMERS AT WORK IN MISSOULA **Missoula police offer tips for protection**

A recent increase in telephone, Internet and mail scams means Missoula residents should remember to be wary.

“If it sounds too good to be true, it usually is,” says Rob Scheben, the Missoula Police Department’s crime prevention officer.

These fraudulent offers are visiting Missoula residents in several ways, bringing complaints to Scheben’s office.

Mail: Residents have received phony checks with letters asking the victim to cash the checks and send back a certain percentage of the money for processing. The checks later prove not to be good. Another mail scam involves the senders posing as relatives saying they are in jail and need the victim to send money. The letter usually asks for the money to be sent as a Western Union or MoneyGram transfer. In another mail scam, a letter may inform the victim that he or she has won a lottery but must send money to receive the payoff.

“Lotteries do not ask for money up front,” Scheben says. “That just does not happen.”

Internet: The most common sources for Internet scams in Missoula seem to originate from Nigeria, Canada and Jamaica. Often, the offer is similar to mail offers, notifying the victims that they have won money in a lottery or that a relative needs money. Internet scams often tell the victim that a relative overseas has died and willed money to the victim, who can claim the money by sending a fee.

Telephone: The same scams occur on the telephone. Montanans, especially older people, are often easy targets because they are trusting. Never give out a credit card number or other personal information, and never agree to send money to a stranger who calls.

The Missoula Police Department works with the Office of Consumer Protection when scams are reported. Even during the recent outbreak of fraud, Missoula residents are generally knowledgeable and sophisticated and usually spot fraud.

Questions? Call Rob Scheben at 552-6335.

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