



# PARTNERS IN CRIME PREVENTION

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## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

2020 CRIME STATS – FRAUD IS WAY UP	1
FRAUD & SCAMS – BASIC PREVENTION STEPS	2
PREVENTING SCAMS – SLOW DOWN	2
FRAUD & SCAMS – GETTING HELP/ LEARNING ABOUT SCAMS	3
IDENTITY THEFT – A PROFOUND EFFECT ON PEOPLE'S LIVES	3
PSYCHOLOGY OF SCAMS – TAKING ADVANTAGE WHEN WE ARE MOST VULNERABLE	4

## 2020 CRIME STATS— FRAUD IS WAY UP

Earlier this summer, the Washington Association of Sheriffs & Police Chiefs (WASPC) released the crime statistics for jurisdictions in Washington State in 2020.

The statistics for the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office (SCSO) show,

- Robbery- up 12%
- Burglary- down -13.2%
- Larceny- Theft- up 4.6%
- Motor Vehicle theft- up 0.3%
- Drug/Narcotic Violations- up 7.2%
- Fraud- up 205%

The most dramatic change is in fraud. In 2020, SCSO reported a 205% increase of fraud, with 1,553 incidents reported in 2020 compared to 509 in 2019.

This trend follows the statewide increase in fraud. WASPC reports a 131% increase in fraud throughout the state with 59,134 reported fraud offenses in 2020 versus 25,562 offenses in 2019.

WASPC attributes the cause to the fraudulent unemployment claims that took advantage of the state's program to help workers who were suddenly unemployed due to the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. Most of the fraudsters were from out of country. One fraud ring

was from Nigeria.

While this may be a one time spike, it does demonstrate the increase in fraud and scams over the past few years. Reliance on online activity to order products and for work has given fraudsters new opportunities to take people's money and/or their personal information to make purchases in the victim's name.

Modern fraud and scams, whether they are through the web, robocalls, emails, social media, or text messages, take advantage of the ease that our modern technology gives all of us to communicate. Its easy for scammers to dial thousands of robocalls each day to trick a few people to send money or give their personal information.

This future presents a challenge for law enforcement at all levels including local, state, and federal. Local law enforcement may find it difficult to hold accountable fraudsters located in foreign countries. Even national law enforcement agencies, that have more resources, may have a difficult time extraditing criminals if a country does not want to cooperate.

WASPC 2020 Annual Report- <https://www.waspc.org/assets/CJIS/Crime%20In%20Washington%202020-small.pdf>



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## PREVENTING SCAMS- SLOW DOWN

*If you receive a call from someone claiming to be from the local court claiming that you did not show up for jury duty, demanding payment for a "fine" with gift cards or you will be arrested in minutes, the easiest thing to do is to hang up.*

*But the scammer may be clever and you may listen for more than a few seconds. Email and text messages from scammers can have the same effect in scaring you into action.*

*If you find yourself listening to a scammer, take time to check out what they are saying. For example in the jury duty scam, call the agency the caller claims to be from. Don't use the number or link that the caller gives you, but do a web search for the agency and call the number that you find from the search.*

*Ask a friend or family member if they think the caller is a scammer.*

*The important thing is to take the emotion out of the call and use logic and some research to find out if the caller is legitimate or not.*

## FRAUD & SCAMS- BASIC PREVENTION STEPS

While there are challenges for law enforcement agencies in apprehending scammers, there are things you can do to protect yourself.

Scammers constantly develop new tactics, but their goals are the same. They want you to give them your personal information and they want to take your money. They will use different scams, impersonation scams, grandparent scams, disaster scams, online shopping, tech support, and many more.

But there are similarities to their techniques that can be seen across different scams-

**Get you emotional.** Scammers want to get you emotional so that you are not thinking logically and so that they can have control of your actions psychologically. Once they have you "under the ether" they can get you to provide anything that they want.

**Put pressure on to act quickly.** This is a tactic that tries to prevent you from thinking, or asking a friend or family member for advice.

**Keep it a secret.** Scammers want to cut you off from other people. In some cases they may try to coerce you into not telling anyone about the (fake) problem that you have to solve.

**Convince you they are in authority.** They may claim to be from the local police, court, utility, IRS, charity, etc. If they can convince you that they are from a government or organization that you know, then

you will be more likely to take their instructions.

**Use methods of payment that are untraceable.** IRS, local courts, utilities, etc. will not ask for payment in gift cards, crypto currency, wire transfer, peer to peer app, etc. If the scammer meets you in person, he would ask for cash. But payments like gift cards are easier over long distances and cannot be traced.

What you can do-

**Hang up.** If someone calls saying they are from a utility, IRS, sheriff's office, Microsoft, etc. and starts pressuring you, hang up. Don't engage them! Having a simple refusal script posted by your phone might help.

**Don't give your info to strangers who call you out of the blue.** In many cases, the organization the scammer claims to be from already knows the information that he wants.

**Place a credit freeze with the credit agencies.** Place the freeze with Transunion, Experian, and Equifax for you and your minor children. This can help prevent a stranger from opening an account in your name.

**Use strong passwords and 2 factor authentication.** DO NOT use the same password on more than one account. This can help prevent a scammer from taking over your email, social media, or financial accounts.

## FRAUD & SCAMS- GETTING HELP/LEARNING ABOUT SCAMS

AARP's Fraud Watch Network says, "If you know about a scam, you're 80% less likely to interact with it." Scammers change their schemes regularly and quickly. Having an awareness of what scams are currently being perpetrated can help you and your family avoid being victimized.

Several non-profit and governmental agencies provide information on scams to the public.

Two non-profit organizations offer help lines and information about fraud and scams. Both can provide information about how to spot a scam, recommended actions if you have experienced fraud, and guidance to families of loved ones who are being targeted by a scammer.

**AARP Fraud Watch Network-** While AARP provides services to senior citizens, its Fraud Watch Network is open to anyone, you do not need to be a member of AARP. You can call its toll free number, (877) 908-3360, if you have a question about a scam or would like help if you have experienced a scam. Its web address is <https://www.aarp.org/money/scams-fraud/about-fraud-watch-network/>

**Identity Theft Resource Center (ITRC)-** The ITRC researches identity theft, issues reports on data breaches and identity theft, and educates the public. It also has a hot line that you can call, (888) 400-5530, to receive help if you have experienced identity theft. Its web site is at <https://www.idtheftcenter.org/>.

**Better Business Bureau (BBB)-** The BBB educates the public about scams that they might encounter on its website, <https://www.bbb.org/all/spot-a-scam>.

**Federal Trade Commission (FTC)-** The FTC collaborates with law enforcement agencies around the world to promote consumer protection and it educates the public about scams and fraud. You can learn about current fraud schemes, report fraud and identity theft, and learn how to develop an identity theft recovery plan at <https://www.ftc.gov/>.

**Washington State Attorney General's Office-** The Washington State AG provides information about fraud, scams, and other consumer related issues as well as a link to file a complaint at <https://www.atg.wa.gov/consumer-issues>.

**Federal Bureau of Investigation, Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3)-** The FBI's IC3 provides a place online to report internet crime. Its website also has information about scams, Business Email Compromise, ransomware and elder fraud at <https://www.ic3.gov>.

**US Postal Inspection Service (USPIS)-** The USPIS protects the public from any fraud that uses the mail. Its website has tips on how you can protect yourself from fraud and a way to report mail related crime at <https://www.uspis.gov/tips-prevention>.

## IDENTITY THEFT - A PROFOUND EFFECT ON PEOPLE'S LIVES

*A recent report by the ITRC shows the impact of identity theft on its victims-*

*While most victims lost less than \$500, 21% told ITRC that they lost more than \$20,000 to identity theft.*

*Almost one third (29%) of victims contacting the ITRC have been victimized previously.*

*1% of victims who contacted the ITRC said that they could resolve their issues in one day.*

*Pre-pandemic, 37% of identity crime victims victimized in 2019 were not able to resolve those issues as of May 2020.*

*During the pandemic, 75% of victims victimized in 2020 said that their issues were still unresolved as of April 2021.*

<https://www.idtheftcenter.org/the-identity-theft-resource-centers-2021-consumer-aftermath-report-reveals-impacts-on-covid-19-identity-crime-victims/>

**PSYCHOLOGY OF SCAMS- TAKING ADVANTAGE WHEN WE ARE MOST VULNERABLE**

Most of us probably get that scammers are after our money and identity and that hanging up is the best way to protect ourselves from being victimized. Yet scamming remains lucrative.

Earlier this year, AARP and the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) published the results of a study that they conducted that found situational factors that can set the stage for someone to be victimized by a scammer. The study classified the situational factors into three categories,

- **Circumstances-** such as losing a job, losing a family member to death or divorce, financial insecurity, being isolated from family and friends, or experiencing mobility issues/needing to rely on others.
- **Victim Characteristics-** such as feeling depressed, a lack of a sense of purpose, feeling unseen or lonely, physical/mental health changes/degradation, having/feeling a need to atone for past wrongs, feeling impulsive, overly trusting of others, experiencing a history of abuse, lacking knowledge of scams.
- **Biases-** such as judging a decision based on its outcome, listening to

information that confirms preconceptions, overestimating the importance of information that is available, relying more heavily on the first piece of information offered, failing to recognize one’s own biases.

Helping potential chronic victims avoid scams may be most effective from people they know and trust. If a family member or a friend is engaged with a scammer there are things that you can do to help them out of the situation. AARP recommends when talking to someone about the scam that you use language that empowers not shames.

Finding a way to help your family member or friend to hold the scammer accountable can help them with their self-esteem, confidence, and sense of self-worth. Reporting the incident to an agency such as local law enforcement, the Washington State Attorney General’s Office, the Federal Trade Commission, or the FBI can give the victim a sense that they have done something.

AARP/FINRA Study-  
[https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/money/scams\\_fraud/2021/03/AARP-chronic-fraud-victimization-report-2-26.pdf](https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/money/scams_fraud/2021/03/AARP-chronic-fraud-victimization-report-2-26.pdf)

**OFFICE OF NEIGHBORHOODS**

**MAKING OUR NEIGHBORHOODS SAFER**

<https://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/311/Office-of-Neighborhoods>

**Homeless Outreach-**  
 Sgt. James Chelin  
 Phone: (425) 508-8221  
 Email: [james.chelin@snoco.org](mailto:james.chelin@snoco.org)

**SHERIFF’S OFFICE CRIME PREVENTION WEB PAGE:**

<http://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/289/Crime-Prevention>

**NEWSLETTER INFO**

**EDITOR**  
 Steve Moller

If you have questions regarding this newsletter or any articles that appear in it, please contact the editor at [neighborhoodwatch@snoco.org](mailto:neighborhoodwatch@snoco.org)

**TIP LINES**



Snohomish County Sheriff’s Office: 425-388-3845

<http://snohomishcountywa.gov/303/Anonymous-Tips>

Crime Stoppers of Puget Sound: 1-800-222-8477