

Senior Fraud Alert—March 26, 2008

Some Seniors switched to unlisted telephone numbers without their knowledge



Two cases have been encountered in North Carolina where overseas con artists have isolated their older victims by switching the victims' phone numbers to unlisted numbers which only the scammers know. It is common for scammers to isolate elderly repeat victims from their families, friends, religious communities and other support networks using psychological ploys. Often this is done by warning the victims to keep information about the transactions secret for security purposes or to keep family members from meddling in the transactions and causing them to fail. In these new instances, the scammers make it so that only they can communicate with the victim by phone.

At this point, it is not entirely clear how the scammers managed to get the phone numbers switched. It is believed that during the course of the scams, which were phony foreign sweepstakes, the con artists obtained Social Security numbers and other personal identification numbers from their victims. Then they contacted the local phone company impersonating the victims and requested that the numbers be changed. This occurred after the victims had engaged in several transactions with the scammers. Once the scammers were the sole possessors of the victims' phone numbers, they attempted to obtain even larger sums of money from them.

If you find that an elderly relative, friend or neighbor suddenly has an unlisted telephone number, you might want to make personal contact with them to make sure they are aware of the change. On the other hand, it is recommended if you are a repeat victim of telemarketing fraud, that you obtain an unlisted telephone number, but also take the necessary steps to ensure that family, friends, banks, utility companies, care providers and other important contacts are aware of the new numbers.

