

Jury Duty Scams

Nobody likes being called in for jury duty. But a recently revived scam has painted the entire experience in a more sinister hue.

Here's how it plays out: The scammer calls a victim, claiming to work for the local court. The scammer tells the victim they've missed their call to jury duty and that there is a warrant out for the victim's arrest.

The victim, of course, denies ever having received a summons to jury duty. The scammer then asks the victim for some identifying information to verify if the notification was indeed sent out. The victim, eager to clear up the alleged misunderstanding, willingly shares their Social Security number, date of birth or even credit card information. Obviously, all the scammer wants to do with this information is steal it — and benefit from the victim's identity.



Once this information changes hands and the caller has “verified” that the victim has received jury duty notification, the scammer may then demand a payment to the tune of \$1,000 or more. The scammer stresses that the fine must be paid immediately to help the victim avoid an arrest. This is when the hapless victim starts seeing visions of SWAT teams in full protective gear bursting into their home and dragging them out the door in handcuffs. By now, they're shaking from fear and will pay *any* price to buy their freedom.

Unluckily for the victim, the fun is just beginning. Once they've agreed to pay the fine, they will be sent on a wild goose chase around town, purchasing reloadable money cards in several different stores as per the scammer's directive. All this time, the victim is certain the entire police force is already on their tail and they are frantically rushing to do the scammer's bidding. When the chase is finally over and all the cards have been purchased, the victim is then instructed to send their money to the “courthouse” so they can be free from the threat of arrest.

At this point, the victim may be heaving a sigh of relief, but it's the crooked scammer who is gleefully rubbing their hands together and laughing maniacally. Not only did they milk this oblivious victim for a cool thousand bucks, they also have the victim's personal details, making a full identity theft the next scandalous step in this scam.

Jury duty scams like these are popping up all over the U.S. They've already been reported in Michigan, Ohio, Texas, Arizona, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Oregon and Washington state.

Sadly, this scam often works. The victim tends to get flustered and anxious about their alleged pending arrest, so their fear drives them to drop their guard and mindlessly comply with whatever the caller tells them to do.

Don't be the next victim! Read on to learn how to spot these scams for what they are.

Red flags

If you're a vigilant citizen who is always up on the latest scams, you will probably know enough to recognize the one major flaw in this scam: It is executed over the phone. Government workers rarely reach out to people by phone; they prefer to use snail mail. When a courthouse worker *does* call a private juror, they most definitely won't ask for private

information over the phone! Also, there is no reason for a federal court to request your Social Security number at all. And finally, skipping out on jury duty never leads to an arrest!

While this scam is almost always played out over the phone, there have been some instances of jury duty scams being pulled via email. The script is nearly identical, save for the medium of communication between scammer and victim – the victim is pressured into sharing sensitive information and/or paying a fine, or risk being jailed for skipping out on jury duty. The same red flags apply as above: A government worker won't contact you through email and they won't demand that you share sensitive information via unsecured means.

Protect yourself

If one of these goofballs tries pulling the wool over your eyes with this scam, make sure you know what to do.

First, don't engage with the scammer. Often, the scammers are skilled enough to use a fake Caller ID to fool victims. If it looks like the local courthouse is calling you, don't pick up the phone. Remember, it's highly unlikely that a courthouse worker is on the other end of the line.

If you already picked up and the caller starts reading you the riot act about missed jury duty, penalties and your pending arrest, hang up as quickly as you can. They may try to scare you or threaten you, but don't be afraid. If you refuse to cooperate, they will have no power over you.

Finally, if you've gotten hooked and find yourself being asked to share sensitive information, remember the golden rule: NEVER share your identifying details over an unsafe medium.

Stop the scam

Jury duty may not be your idea of a fun way to pass the time, but it is an integral part of our court system and deserves our respect. The scammers in this con are impersonating members of the federal court and have therefore committed a serious crime. If you are targeted by a jury duty scam, notify the Clerk of Court's office of the U.S. District Court in your area. It's also a good idea to let the FTC know at ftc.gov.

Don't let these crooks get away with their crime!

Your Turn: Have you been targeted by a jury duty scam? Share your experience with us in the comments!

SOURCES*:

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