

Seattle Police Email Community Newsletter
March 26, 2015

Dear Community Friends,

Prepaid Debit Card Scams

Our officers have received numerous complaints from people who have received phone calls from people for various reasons: saying they are from City Light demanding immediate payment of an outstanding bill or their electricity will be cut off; a police department requesting them to bail a relative out of jail; or a representative collecting other outstanding bills. Others have reported receiving calls from an agency claiming that there is a warrant out for the person's arrest and if they didn't immediately pay, they would be arrested.

These callers request that the person purchase prepaid debit cards, which can be purchased at chain retailers (such as Safeway, Walgreen's, and 7-11 to name a few) and load them up with cash. Then, the callers request that the citizen provide them with the security number off the back of the cards. These security numbers need to be scratched off to be seen. Even though the cards clearly say not to give out these numbers, the unsuspecting victim does. The caller/thieves can retrieve this money with this security code and there is no way the victim can get their money back or stop the transaction. Often, the victims are out hundreds if not thousands of dollars. The elderly and English as a second language seem to be the primary targets of these scams. Several businesses have reported the "City Light" version of the scam to us; the amount the callers said was owed was plausible, so the business owners weren't overly suspicious at first.

These types of scams have been around for a number of years. The problem is not with the prepaid debits cards themselves; the problem is with those who prey on the fear of others and convince them to use this payment method to bilk victims out of their money. And while the callers may sound legit, they are not; especially since the callers/thieves become much more aggressive the more they have to talk to convince you to do as they ask.

Some things to keep in mind

- Your utility company *is not* going to contact you by phone telling you to pay immediately using a prepaid debit card or be cut off.
- The police *are not* going to call you to ask you to pay someone's bail (not in our job authority or responsibility).
- Police *are not* going to call and tell you about the outstanding warrant you didn't know you had and if you don't pay immediately, you'll be arrested. (First, you can't "buy" your way out of an arrest warrant. Secondly, if there's a warrant out on you, you probably already know that.)
- No public utility, law enforcement entity, nor any other government agency is going to ask for payment card information over the phone.

What To Do

If you receive one of these calls, the best thing to do is hang up. Take a moment and breathe. If the claim regards a utility (City Light, Puget Sound Energy) call them directly and inquire about the status of your account. If it's a request to post someone's bail, you should be getting that call from the person directly, not via a third person; make sure you actually know the person whose bail you're going to post and that where you are to send funds is a legitimate court or bail bond service. And please do report the attempted fraud. Give us as much information as possible, including the phone number from which you receive the call if you can retrieve that information.

For a list of fraud and scams, and measures to avoid falling victim to them, please check the Federal Bureau of Investigations website at <http://www.fbi.gov/scams-safety/frauds-from-a-to-z>.

The National Council on Aging also has good advice regarding fraud and scams. A search of Fraud and Scams on their website will get you information such as: Top 10 Scams Targeting Seniors; 22 Tips for Avoiding Scams & Swindles; Top 8 Ways to Protect Yourself from Scams. <http://www.ncoa.org/>

Question of the Month

Is there a place we can go to view stolen items that are recovered due to an arrest, or at least view items that go up for auction after being released from evidence?

Precinct Burglary/Theft Detectives are responsible for the return of most recovered stolen property to the victims. If the property is designated as "found property," it will go to our Evidence Unit where our Found Property Detective will do record searches to find the owners. The difficulty is that recovered property often cannot be linked back to a particular incident due to lack of make, model and serial numbers or descriptions provided by the property owners. It is particularly difficult with bicycles (as many bike owners do not record the bike's serial number and most bicycle shops do not keep records of an individual's bicycle purchases), and jewelry (which have no serial numbers and are often quickly sold after the theft and melted down or resold). Having pictures of your valuables with descriptors, particularly jewelry, stored someplace safe can help in the identification and return of the property.

Having serial number for those items that have them (cell phones, DVD players, GPs' iPads/iPods) and providing that information to the investigating officers does help. Further, if you can engrave your personal property with your driver's license number, you create an identifier unique to you that can be traced back to you by law enforcement if an item with that number is recovered. We also recommend keeping an inventory list of your valuables with all that information (item, make, model serial number, description, approximate value, if it's engraved). Again for those items that can't be engraved or don't have serial numbers (jewelry, artwork) take a picture, put it on the inventory list and store that information someplace safe (like the Cloud, or maybe email the info to yourself, which is what I've done with my inventory list). A Household Inventory template is attached with this newsletter.

Some items that cannot be returned to the rightful owner are passed on to Propertyroom.com, (www.propertyroom.com) who auctions the items and uses the proceeds to provide pension funds for retired law enforcement officers that served prior to them having a retirement funding system (we're talking really old officers). If you view an item on their website and can assert that the item belongs to you, Propertyroom.com will not sell it and will make every attempt to return it to you.

The following appeared in the SPD Blotter

Police Arrest Suspect In Violent Robbery At Rainier Beach Doughnut Shop

Written by [Jonah Spangenthal-Lee](#) on March 24, 2015 5:18 pm

SPD detectives are investigating a man who barricaded himself in a crawlspace Tuesday in the International District for [a violent robbery at a Rainier Beach doughnut shop](#).

The 21-year-old man led US Marshals and Seattle police on a brief chase around 12:30 PM after they tried to arrest him for several felony warrants. Detectives also believe the man is a suspect in a January 3rd beating and robbery at Rainier Beach's King Donuts, which left the shop's owners severely injured.

The US Marshals Fugitive Task Force spotted the man Tuesday near 12th Avenue and Jackson Street and chased him to an accounting office at 12th and Main St. The man slithered into a crawlspace beneath the business and refused to come out.

SPD patrol officers joined marshals at the scene and called in negotiators, SWAT officers, and K9 units, who spent two and a half hours trying to coax the man out of his hiding place. SWAT officers entered the crawlspace and took the man into custody shortly after 3 PM.

Detectives plan to book the man on a Department of Corrections warrant and are still investigating his connection to the doughnut shop robbery.

Thank you for all you do for your community. Until next time, Take Care and Stay Safe!

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<http://www.seattle.gov/police/>

<http://www.SPDBlotter.Seattle.gov>

<http://www.seattle.gov/police/tweets/>

