Imposter Scams Top FTC’s 2017 List of Frauds

The Federal Trade Commission received nearly 350,000 reports about imposter scams last year, making it the top type of fraud two years in a row.

How does this scam work?
Imposter scams involve a criminal pretending to be someone else in an attempt to get the victim to send money. It could be via phone or email, and the scammer could pretend to be a government official, someone you know or someone you’ve met online but haven’t met in person.

Common schemes include the scammer telling the victim the caller/sender is a grandchild in trouble, the criminal claiming to be from the IRS or the scammer pretending to be tech support for the victim’s computer. The scammer tries to convince the victim that money is needed to solve a crisis, and attempts to get the victim to wire money for fees, taxes or to help someone the victim cares about.

The FTC reported that nearly one in five people who reported an imposter scam in 2017 lost money, which amounted to $328 million lost.

How can I protect myself?
Before you ever send money to anyone who calls or emails you, stop and check it out. Call the person, company or government agency with which the person asking for money claims to be affiliated and ask questions to find out if the situation is legitimate. Chances are, it will not be. The IRS never initiates contact via telephone, and no government agency will ever ask you to wire money.

What if I’m a victim?
Always report all scams and fraud to your local law enforcement agency’s non-emergency number. If you believe someone is in danger, call 911. Report all scams and financial abuse to the state attorney general, and file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission at ftc.gov/complaint.