

Be sure you know about “sex offender” scams

written by Sandy | August 5, 2021



This is Part I in a two-part “Be sure you know about...” series. [Previous scam information can be seen here.](#)

By Sandy . . . Vigilante scams targeting those on sex offender registries are on the rise. Across the country reports are coming in. This activity bears all the hallmarks of other vigilante action. It targets those on the registry by using the registry to identify them. It uses tactics designed to create fear. Its purpose is to harm those on the registry in some manner. It takes many forms.

We learn from our Texas affiliate Texas Voices that Harris County, which is essentially Houston, issued a warning to registrants on August 3.

Texas Voices writes, “Harris County sent out a blast email this morning to registrants in their county. They should have done this sooner. Many registered people have lost money to this scam. The scammers use multiple scenarios as to why a

warrant has been issued. One of our members was told that the law had changed and that he was required to register twice a year instead of once a year.”

The email blast from Harris County says:

Public announcement – Telephone scam

The Harris County Sheriff’s Office, along with other law enforcement agencies, have received information regarding a telephone scam that targets registered sex offenders in an effort to extort money. When the victim is contacted, the caller claims to be affiliated with the local law enforcement agency. The caller then informs the victim they are non-compliant, usually for not submitting their DNA, and that they have an open warrant, which will result in their arrest if they fail to pay a specific fine. The victim is instructed to obtain a Best Buy, iTunes, MoneyPak or some other type gift cards with a specific dollar amount. Once the cards are obtained, the caller instructs the victim to provide a unique number on the back of the card(s), which gives them the ability use the card. Another version of the scam is that the suspect tells the victim to meet to pay a cash fine or to deposit the cash in a non-existent kiosk at the law enforcement agency. Be advised that a law enforcement agency, specifically the Harris County Sheriff’s, will NEVER contact registered sex offenders to pay fines or fees via these methods. The Harris County Sheriff’s Office is aware of the scam and has an ongoing investigation. If you have similar incidents, notify the Harris County Sheriff’s Office via SORT@sheriff.hctx.net.

NCRSOL, our North Carolina affiliate, reports that they have sent numerous warnings to their membership in newsletters, and complaints have been filed with appropriate agencies.

Scams are targeting registrants and their family members in

North Carolina – and have been for quite some time. However, despite registrants either filing police reports or attempting to escalate the issue to the NC Attorney General, nothing is being done.

One of the largest problems is that the scammers/impersonators sound convincing. The scheme sounds legit. And, of course, the scammers/impersonators are using online registry information. The more the registry has, the better the conversation for the scammers. Registrants are an especially vulnerable population.

Our Oklahoma representative reports holding a very dubious distinction and has a simple but effective method of dealing with scam artists.

I probably hold some kind of record. I have had registry scammers call me eight times. The last one was a two-man team. The first one told me that there was an irregularity with my registration. I don't remember exactly what it was, but a bench warrant had been issued, he said, and he wanted me to talk to his "sergeant." I hung up before he came on, so the first guy called me back and told me that if I didn't stay on the line, they would come arrest me. I hung up again. I'm still waiting for them to show.

In Oregon, scams have taken a new twist, as related by this parent in an email to NARSOL.

I want to share something that happened to my son Friday night.

He received a social media alert that he'd received a message. When he opened it, it was a naked photo of a woman with the face blacked out. He did not respond and immediately deleted the photo and blocked the sender.

An hour or so later, he received a call from a man claiming to be an investigator with Beacon Investigations, a large

national firm. He said the photo had been of, first, an 18, then 17, and, finally, 14-year-old girl. The "girl" had purportedly sent the photo from her mom's work tablet then smashed the tablet with a hammer. "Mom" was demanding \$1100 now from my son for a new tablet or she would go to the police.

My son had the wherewithal to tell the person he was going to start recording the call, and he asked for credentials, which, of course, were not forthcoming. As the person grew more impatient, he said he was then at the police department with "Officer Dan," and he asked my son to hold on. He then heard a click and what sounded like a recording of sirens.

When my son told him he was going to record and that if he would give him a name and phone number, he would have his attorney call on Monday, the caller said, "F___," and hung up. My son called the legitimate Beacon Investigations, gave them the caller's number, and reported that they were being used in an extortion attempt.

I just wanted you to know. I imagine that this scam is one that could quickly catch on and cause great panic and strife.

Yes, I am sure that it will, just as will this one reported to its membership by our Virginia affiliate Safer Virginia in a newsletter. [Even the media in Virginia were warning of this scam activity.](#)

Every Virginian should be aware of a very sophisticated scam that is targeting citizens on the registry. It is relatively new and has been seen in some other states as well. As a target of this scam, I can say that it is nerve-wracking and very believable.

I received a call, "Officer Davis" from the local Sheriff's Office, letting me know that I was on a recorded line. The

officer, who provided his badge number, claimed there was a warrant out for my arrest because I failed to appear for a "second DNA sample." I asked to speak to a supervisor and was handed off to "Lieutenant O'Bryant." I was told that a summons had been sent to my home—which I must have missed—which required that I should have appeared to submit a DNA sample, that I had missed that appointment, and that therefore a bench warrant had been issued for my arrest. I was told deputies would be dispatched to bring me in unless I came to the sheriff's office to resolve the issue. I told them I was calling my attorney, and they warned me that I could not get off the phone because they would assume at that point that I was a flight risk and that they would send deputies to my home immediately. Thankfully, there were enough clues to figure out this was bogus, but there were a lot of tricks they were using to make the experience feel very real (such as a police radio in the background and the parties talking to it).

Registrants are the target of scams frequently. The best defense is to be aware of them and know what to do. Do not give the caller any information about yourself or your conviction. No law enforcement agency will ask you for money over the phone. Generally, law enforcement will not advise you of an active warrant; they will simply come collect you. If you question the call, hang up and call the known number for the law enforcement agency—not the number you got the call from—and ask them if they are forcing people to come in.

NARSOL endorses and stresses the advice given by Safer Virginia. Scammers will not cease their activities against registered people. It is just another form of vigilantism, and one that can pay off for them.

We must be aware, stay alert, and be smarter than they are.