

MAGAZINE SUBSCRIPTION SALES – IT MIGHT BE COMPLICATED

Door to door peddlers are a fraud risk. That message is one we repeat often. These solicitors cause a lot of economic loss every year in this county. They show up at your door, usually in the warmer weather, hawking everything from frozen meat, driveway paving, and roof painting, to magazines. But today I want to focus on one aspect of this enterprise, which pushes the smaller dollar merchandise, for example, cleaning products or magazines.

I recently attended a short presentation on human trafficking, and to my surprise, learned how one segment of human trafficking involves these door to door peddlers. It's called "labor trafficking", when people are compelled to perform labor or services by force, fraud, or coercion. Various investigations found many cases in which magazine sales crews fraudulently recruited young people to work for them, and then exploited them.

How did this work? Unscrupulous companies running these crews enticed recruits with promises of high wages or rewards, the opportunity for travel, and other inducements. Then after the crew took to the road, crew leaders confiscated the phones, ID's, and wallets of the workers. The crew leaders also denied food to those not making their daily sales quotas, or administered beatings to them. So the unfortunate youth who thought they signed up for a job with high pay and travel, found themselves pretty much locked into working on these crews, no money, no phone, far from home, and isolated. This is labor trafficking.

Okay, you say, this is bad news, but how does it affect me? Well, just keep this in mind the next time some young person comes to your door selling magazines. I don't encourage you to buy magazines out of pity – just the opposite. Refuse to buy anything. But you should call police. Every jurisdiction in Clinton County requires door to door peddlers to carry a permit to solicit. In Clinton, the peddler must wear the permit around their neck. These magazine sales crews almost never obtain these permits. So the lack of a permit gives you a great reason to call the police, and get them involved. In addition, you can ask the peddler, "Can I call someone for you?" If their boss confiscated their phone, that offer might be a chance of escape for this youth, a chance to re-connect with home and family.

You don't need to offer sanctuary to such a peddler, but I do want to raise your awareness on this issue.

UTILITY DISCONNECT SCAM TARGETS DENTISTS AND RESTAURANTS

In the last week, I received a half dozen reports from various businesses, telling me they received calls from someone impersonating representatives of Alliant Energy or Mid-American Energy. The callers threatened to disconnect the electric utilities within a half hour unless someone paid the delinquent bill.

This series of calls mostly targeted restaurants and dentists, and no one is reporting a loss from this scheme. Oddly enough, some of the calls which impersonated Mid-American Energy went to Clinton locations, where Alliant Energy is the utility provider. So that made it all too easy for those answering the call to establish this as a scam.

This scam cycles through as least once a year. If you manage a small business or write the checks for one, you should know this scam crops up from time to time. The utilities tell us if you are facing a disconnect, it will come with plenty of notice. If you're really concerned when you get such a call, look up the number of your service provider and call directly. Don't use the number the scam caller gave you. In these latest cases, the phone numbers of the scammers appeared to be spoofed from an energy company in South Dakota.

THE COST OF ROMANCE SCAMS

The Federal Trade Commission released some eye-popping statistics on the extent of romance or online dating scams and the economic loss associated with them. Reports of this particular scam tripled from 2012 to 2016. The reported loss in 2016 alone was \$220 million, with the average loss around \$15,000. That's a pretty sharp punch, making this scam one of the more rewarding (for the crooks) frauds out there.

It's always a scam when the online love interest:

- professes love quick
- claims to be a US citizen, but working overseas, or serving overseas in the military
- needs money for emergencies ,hospital bills, or travel
- plans to visit, but the plans fall through due to an emergency

If this sounds familiar to a situation you're in, stop contact immediately. If you hear of someone else in such a situation, tell them it is a scam. Encourage them to get hold of me.

CONTACT SENIORS VS. CRIME

Let me know about scams, fraud, or other crookedness you run across. Most of what I learn, I learn from you. Contact me at Seniors vs. Crime, Clinton County Sheriff's Office, 563-242-9211 extension 4433, or email me at randymeier@gapa911.us.

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