

# Using Money Transfer Services

*You've won a prize!*

We're temporarily unable to accept credit cards.

*Grandma I'm in a foreign country, and I need cash.*

Scam artists use a number of elaborate schemes to get your money, and many involve money transfers through companies like Western Union and MoneyGram or the purchase of a GreenDot Money Pak or Walmart MoneyCard. These are legitimate companies being used by criminals to take advantage of you.

Why do scammers pressure people to use money transfers? So they can get their hands on the money before their victims realize they've been cheated. Typically, there is no way you can reverse the transaction or trace the money. Another reason: When you wire money to another country, the recipient can pick it up at multiple locations, making it nearly impossible to identify them or track them down. In some cases, the receiving agents of the money transfer company might be complicit in the fraud. Money transfers are virtually the same as sending cash — there are no protections for the sender.

Many money transfer scams involve dramatic or convincing stories that play on your optimistic nature, your altruism or your thriftiness. But no matter how you parse it, they always cost you money. Here are some scams involving money transfers that you may recognize:

## Counterfeit Check Scams

Someone sends you a check with instructions to deposit it and wire some or all the money back. By law, banks must make the funds from deposited checks available within days, but uncovering a fake check can take weeks. You are responsible for the checks you deposit, so if a check turns out to be fraudulent, you will owe the bank any money you withdrew.

## Lotteries and Sweepstakes

You just won a foreign lottery! The letter says so, and a cashier's check is included. All you have to do is deposit the check and wire money to pay for taxes and fees. Oops: The check is no good. Although it looks like a legitimate cashier's check, the bank eventually will determine that it is a fake. The lottery angle is a trick to get you to wire money to someone you don't know. If you deposit the check and wire the money, the check will bounce — and you'll be responsible for the money you sent.

## Overpayment Scams

Someone responds to your posting or ad, and offers to use a cashier's check, personal check or corporate check to pay for the item you're selling. At the last minute, the so-called buyer (or the buyer's "agent") comes up with a reason to write the check for more than the purchase price, and asks you to wire back the difference. The checks are counterfeit, but very often, good enough to fool bank tellers. Acting in good faith, you deposit the check and wire the funds back to the "buyers." Oops: the check bounces. You are liable for the amount you wired.

## Don't wire money to or provide prepaid card numbers to:

- a stranger — in this country or anywhere else
- someone claiming to be a relative in a crisis — and who wants to keep their request for money a secret
- someone who says a money transfer is the only form of payment that's acceptable
- someone who asks you to deposit a check and send some of the money back

## Online Purchase Scams

If you are buying something online and the seller insists on a money transfer or prepaid card as the only form of payment, consider it a red flag: ask to use a credit card, an escrow service (PayPal) or another way to pay. No matter what story the seller tells you, insisting on a money transfer is a signal that you won't get the item — or your money back. Find another seller.

## Family Emergency Scams

You get a call out of the blue from someone who claims to be a member of your family and needs cash to get out of a jam — to fix a car, get out of jail or leave a foreign country. He begs you to wire money right away or to provide the card number to a prepaid money card and to keep the request confidential. Check it out with your family. It's likely they know nothing about it. If you absolutely, positively cannot ignore the request, try to verify the caller's identity by asking very personal questions a stranger couldn't possibly answer. And keep trying to reach the family to check out the story.

If you've wired money to a scam artist, call the money transfer company immediately to report the fraud and file a complaint. You can reach the complaint department of MoneyGram at **1-800-MONEYGRAM (1-800-666-3947)** or Western Union at **1-800-448-1492**. Ask for the money transfer to be reversed. It's unlikely to happen, but it's important to ask. Then dial 911 and report the crime to the Haverford Township Police. You may also file a complaint with the FTC.

*This information is provided by the Haverford Township Police Department Community Policing Unit and portions taken from the FTC website @<https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0090-using-money-transfer-services>. Questions call 610-853-1298 extension 1225.*

***Emergencies Dial 911 immediately.***