

The Bern Township Police Department has become quite busy handling scam complaints. In the interest of alerting citizens to this growing threat and preventing future scamming activity, we are sharing some of fraud activity that we have encountered.

We have heard from a couple of township residents that they have been contacted by an individual claiming to be with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The caller claimed that they were subject to arrest because they were delinquent in tax payments. The real Internal Revenue Service simply does not do business this way – they do not call people – they notify taxpayers via official correspondence. If you are interested in knowing more about the real IRS and how they might contact you over a real tax business matter, consult the IRS web site at irs.gov. A similar scam has been noted when the scammer calls a citizen and tells them that there is an arrest warrant out for them for unpaid fines and that the citizen must send money to avoid arrest. If this might be a possible concern for you, ask for the name of the law enforcement agency that originated the warrant, look up the department's telephone number yourself, and call that law enforcement agency.

We have heard from a township resident that was contacted by an individual purporting to be from Publisher's Clearing House. The caller informed the resident that a prize had been won but that there was money due up front to collect the prize. Once again, we point you to the web site of the real thing – in this case, Publisher's Clearing House, <http://pch.custhelp.com/> – to find out how they would really perform the business of awarding a prize. Quoting directly from their Customer Service Frequently Asked Questions section: "There are never any strings attached to winning a Publishers Clearing House prize. We do not ask for bank account information. There is no processing fee, tax or special handling charge required to win and our prizes are delivered free of charge to the winners. If you are asked to send any money, for any reason, to collect a prize - STOP - you have not heard from the real Publishers Clearing House."

Another scam has arisen where the scammer calls a resident and tells them that their computer is vulnerable and that the caller can sell them an updated antivirus and Internet security package. The caller was not actually affiliated with the software company. Agreeing to receive a computer modification of this kind is not only falling victim to fraud, it is dangerous, as the security package that you receive could contain malicious code, spyware, keystroke loggers, or other means of compromising your computer. The purchase of antivirus and Internet security software should be done by researching various products, checking for both the functions that the product provides and the support that the company provides on an ongoing basis, and then going to a software retailer or to the company's web site directly to purchase or download the product. Remember that when your computer becomes a place where important home records are kept, or personal or financial information is stored, it also becomes a target of opportunity for skilled thieves to commit identity theft or financial crimes. Accepting software, or following links provided by unknown callers or links provided in emails from unknown persons, are extremely risky practices.

Always remember, NEVER give out ANY personal information of any kind or account information of any kind over the telephone unless:

- ✓ You initiated the contact, and
- ✓ You know the person to whom you are speaking, and
- ✓ You completely understand the business reason why your personal information is needed.