

Guard Against the Latest Scams

Whether it be fake cashier's checks, ATM skimming devices or a faith-based investment hoax, be alert to the latest scams being perpetrated on innocent victims.

Fraudulent Cashier's Checks

With new computer technology, crooks find it easy to produce almost perfect copies of checks from banks and other financial institutions.

Law enforcement agencies advise that you never accept a cashier's check from a stranger unless you call the bank that issued the check and verify not only the check number, but also to whom the check was issued. Even though the number on the cashier's check could be a copy of a real number, you want to make sure that the number is on a check that has been made to you.

Many crooks will try to give out fake cashier's checks for purchases on the weekend when banks are closed and you can't verify the check. Bogus cashier's checks are becoming a major scam for many people who choose to sell their cars directly to buyers through classified ads. A potential buyer may approach you on the weekend with a check that may bear an official-looking logo in the name of a local bank and have the term "cashier's check" printed across the top of the check. The seller will assume this is a very safe check. Remember, a bank would never issue a blank cashier's check and probably wouldn't issue a specific dollar amount if the sale is not done through normal retail channels. Do not part with the car until you have talked to the bank directly to verify the check. Additionally, don't depend on a "bank" phone number given to you by the purchaser. It could be the phone number to one of his partners involved with him in the scam. Check the number out in the phone book. If the buyer is reluctant to have the bank verify the funds, contact local law enforcement.

ATM Skimming Devices

A new problem, although not widespread, facing consumers and banks today is ATM skimming devices. These scams involve the use of one or more devices to record account and personal identification numbers (PINs) from your ATM card. The next thing you know,



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crooks are withdrawing money from your checking account. In some cases, skimming devices are placed on the card reader and the keypad without interfering with the operation of the ATM. Therefore, the customer receives his cash when making a withdrawal. In other cases, a non-functioning ATM is installed to capture cards and PINs. The con artists using skimming devices are not your petty thieves. They are part of a very sophisticated and competent

organization.

The ATM industry is diligently working to protect ATM cards and assure the public that these cards are safe to use. With more than 360,000 ATMs nationwide, be aware as a consumer that if something doesn't look right at an ATM, don't use it. Go to another ATM.

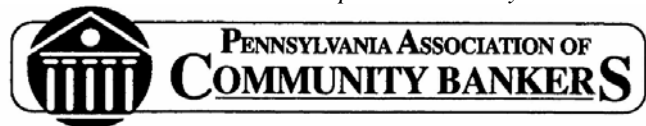
Faith-Based Scams

It is estimated that more than 90,000 people nationwide have lost nearly \$2 billion to "faith-based" investment scams during the past three years.

According to state securities regulators, faith-based investment scams have risen dramatically. Con artists will use religion to promote their scams by using their interpretation of biblical prophecy to predict imminent financial or social crises. Some claim they will reinvest the money in a worthy cause.

Before making any such investment, check with your state securities regulator to see if this investment is licensed in your state. To find your state securities regulator, you may log on to the North American Securities Administrators Association Web site at www.nasaa.org. Additionally, make sure the seller has provided you with written information fully explaining the investment and verify this information with your local banker or financial advisor.

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Note: These tips are intended to provide accurate, yet general consumer information. They are not intended to provide legal, accounting or other professional services. Please contact a professional service provider for specific questions.