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of the United States

Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MONDAY, MARCH 22, 2021

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DLCA Warns of Phony Gift Card Email Scams

(U.S. Virgin Islands) – “Recently, there has been an increase in the number of complaints I have received from persons who have government email addresses regarding phony gift card email scams,” said the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs (DLCA) Commissioner Richard T. Evangelista. “Cyber thieves are now reaching directly into your wallet in addition to your passwords.”

According to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), gift cards are the #1 payment method for impostor scams. In the gift card scam, the scammer plays into your emotions by impersonating someone else and urgently asking or sometimes demanding you to buy gift cards.

FTC warns that the scammer, might pose as IRS officials and say you’re in trouble for not paying taxes; or a family member with an emergency; or a public utility company threatening to shut off your water; or even a servicemember selling something before deployment. Or they might call with great news – you’ve won a contest or a prize! But to get it, you need to pay fees with a gift card.

Some gift card scammers have evolved beyond emails and phone calls and create spoofed email addresses that look like the sender of the message is someone you know. Instead, the email scam could look like it’s coming from your boss, CEO of the company, or president of the University.

The FTC says that the general rule of thumb is, “if anyone tells you to pay by gift card, or by wiring money, – for any reason – that’s a sure sign of scam. “

To assist the community, DLCA is sharing the following information regarding phony gift card email scams reprinted from an article dated January 23, 2020 that appeared in the UC Davis Administrative IT website.

“[G]ift card scams are on the rise and can result in a victim losing hundreds or thousands of dollars. In a typical scam, an employee receives an email that pretends to be from their boss or another senior figure or person of authority. It asks them to buy gift cards and send them photos of the



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www.dlca.vi.gov

backs, for reasons that will supposedly be explained later. The scammer may even ask you to communicate with them via text message.

How to Spot a Gift Card Scam

- Inspect the sender's email address to confirm it's actually coming from that person. Scammers will often send the email from a random email account and change the Display Name of the email address to either your boss, supervisor, or director.



Sample Fake Sender

- The email message will:
 - Indicate some level of urgency, such as indicating they are in a meeting or are heading into a meeting and need your help ASAP.
 - Possibly not include the sender signature, but rather "Sent from my iPad" in order to make it appear as if the person is mobile and away from their desk.
 - Ask you to do them a "favor".
 - Ask you to purchase numerous gift cards with the promise of reimbursement.
 - Possibly have typos and grammatical errors.
 - Appear to be sincere

What To Do

- Ask yourself, "would this person really ask me to do this?"
- Call the sender to verify authenticity of the request.
- Do not reply to the email.
- Do not purchase any gift cards.
- Contact us so we can take additional steps and to help validate the authenticity of the email.

Sample Gift Card Scam Emails

Sample 1

From: Director Name <DirectorName@gmail.com>

Sent: Wednesday, July 10, 2019 1:26 PM

To: UC Employee <ucemployee@ucdavis.edu>

Subject: Request...

I need you to do a chore to purchase Google Play gift cards from Target / Safeway or any other nearby store. Let me know when you receive this email for the amount and denominations you are to purchase then look forward to my response.

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*Director Name,
Director.*

Sent from my iPhone

Sample 2

Jane, could you please email me back? I need a favor.

Sample 3

Sally, are you available at the moment? I need you to handle a project. Very busy at the moment. Can't talk. Just send an email when you receive this. Thanks.

Sample 4

I need you to pick up three Home Depot gift cards for our project.

Sample 5

Good to hear from you. I need to get three iTunes gift cards for my niece. It's her birthday but I can't do this now because I'm currently traveling. Can you get them for me from any store around you? I'll pay back next week when I get back home.

Sample 6

Sitting in a meeting right now, there is something I need you to do. Let me know when you are available.

Sample 7

Hello, are you available? Please I need your assistance urgently.

Sample 8

Okay thanks, I was hoping you could help me get some amazon gift cards from the store, I will reimburse you when I'm done with my conference, I need to send it to someone now and it is very important because it's one of my best friend kid birthday and I fear I may not get it on time myself if I decide to wait it out.

Sample 9

Subject: Are you available?

Are you available? I need you to handle something for me now, I'm currently in a meeting with the International Advisory Committee (IAC) with limited phone call and also experiencing some difficulties at the moment, just reply my e-mail if you are

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available. Thanks

[Signature of a UCD person]

Sample 10

I need you to personally run a task for me ASAP as I am occupied in a meeting at the moment and can't talk but will lookout for your reply and let me know if you can get this done right now.

Thanks"

Nathan Benedicto, UC Davis Administrative IT, January 23, 2020.

Sign up for free scam alerts from the FTC at ftc.gov/scams. Get the latest tips and advice about scams sent right to your inbox.

There are many ways consumers can report a scam. You contact the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs hotlines at (340) 771-SCAM(7226) or (340) 727-SCAM(7226) or via email to consumerawareness@dlca.vi.gov. You may also report scams at ftc.gov/complaint. Your reports help the FTC and other law enforcement investigate scams and bring crooks to justice.