

BUSINESSSAFE

BusinessSafe is designed to aid businesses in protecting the safety and well-being of Florida's residents and visitors from threats. BusinessSafe provides private sector partners with open source information, analysis and resources to help protect their businesses and communities.

Florida Fusion Center 21-084

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BusinessSafe Threat Topic: Elder Abuse Awareness Month

June is Elder Abuse Awareness Month. As part of this, we are sharing information on fraud targeting seniors or their businesses. While these scams can affect people of all ages, some criminal actors choose to target seniors because they are seen as having financial stability either in retirement funds, savings, or home equity.

Criminal Activity

1. **Grandparent Scam** – Scammers may call seniors claiming they are a grandchild or calling on behalf of a grandchild or other relative who needs urgent financial assistance. They may claim to be in distress or under arrest and use language that pressures the senior to send them funds without notifying others. Criminal actors may ask for the senior to pay over the phone using a credit card, gift card or by wiring money. In some instances, a person may be sent to pick up cash or gift cards to transport it to the scammers.
[Two Florida Men Plead Guilty to Running "Grandparent Scam" in Northern Ohio](#)
[Uber Drivers Used in Grandparents Scam, Florida Sheriff Says](#)
2. **Investment Scams** – Criminal actors may approach seniors with claims of investment opportunities for fraudulent businesses with promises of high dollar, quick, recurring, or guaranteed returns. Criminal actors may also create fraudulent business websites to give the appearance of legitimacy. Once money is transferred, the criminal actor typically either disappears or use other tactics to try to get new or existing investors to continue to contribute funds.
[Jury Convicts Former Virginia Beach Investment Advisor and Williamsburg Attorney of \\$25 Million Nationwide Investment Fraud](#)
[Minnesota Man Sentenced To More Than Twelve Years In Federal Prison For Florida Investment Fraud](#)



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3. **Lottery and Sweepstakes Scams** – There are multiple variations of lottery and sweepstakes scams, many of which begin with scammers mailing or calling intended victims and telling them they are a winner. The criminals claim that before the victim is able to receive the prize money, they will need to pay fees or taxes. The criminal actors will request payments be made over the phone using a credit card or by cashier's check, prepaid debit or gift cards. In some instances, criminal actors may claim that to have won the lottery or sweepstakes themselves but are ineligible to collect the winnings. They will then offer a portion of the winnings to the victim if they claim the prize on their behalf by calling a number set up as part of the scam to solicit fake fees and taxes.

[Florida Lottery Warns of Scam Targeting Seniors](#)

[Three Bay County Men Sentenced for Operating Sweepstakes Scam Targeting Elderly Victims](#)

4. **Real Estate Scams** – Real estate scams often involve a criminal actor contacting the victim to persuade them to sell their home or other real estate lower than the market price. The scammers will often claim they already have a buyer identified and all the victim needs to do is sign the contract to complete the sale. Scammers may also try to fraudulently transfer deeds to lots owned by seniors by forging the legitimate owner's signature on a deed and using fraudulent identification or a counterfeit notary to give the documents the appearance of legitimacy. The fraudulent owner then rents or sells the property without the knowledge of the legitimate owner.

[3 Arrested, Accused of Illegally Selling Elderly Woman's Land in Coconut Grove](#)
[County Recorder Warns 'Equity Skimmers' Buying Houses with Low-Ball Offers](#)

Tips to Protect Yourself:

- If it sounds too good to be true, it usually is.
- Thoroughly research companies and discuss potential investments with investment professionals prior to investing.
- Legitimate sweepstakes are free and by chance. If you are contacted by someone claiming you won a lottery or sweepstakes prize, ensure the lottery or sweepstakes is real and contact the company directly.
- Never agree to cash another person's lottery ticket for them.
- If you are wanting to sell your property, have it appraised by a legitimate company.
- Check your real estate deeds quarterly.



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Resources

- The Federal Trade Commission offers information and reporting resources regarding [Fake Prize, Sweepstakes, and Lottery Scams](#).
- The FBI offers information on [Elder Fraud](#) as well as reporting options. To report elder fraud, you can contact your local [FBI field office](#), [submit a tip online](#), or file a complaint through the [FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center](#).
- The Florida Attorney General Offers resources for identifying and reporting elder fraud in Florida on their [Senior Protection Team](#) website.
- The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission's Office of Investor Education and Advocacy offers a guide for [Seniors to Protect Against Investment Fraud](#).
- The U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs Offers a [National Hotline](#) to assist victims or potential victims of elder financial fraud. The Hotline can be reached at 833-FRAUD-11 (833-372-8311).
- The Florida Lottery offers information on sweepstakes and lottery scams and reporting on their [website](#). Scams or suspected scams can be reported by contacting the Florida Lottery's Division of Security at 850-487-7730.

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