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CONSUMER ALERT

Jury Duty Scam Just Another ID Theft Trick

The FBI and other law enforcement agencies around the country have reported the resurgence of an old trick known as the jury duty scam.

In this scam, potential victims receive calls from people posing as court officers. The caller informs the victim that he or she failed to appear for jury duty and that a warrant has been issued for his or her arrest. After alarming the victim, the caller then seeks to "confirm" the victim's Social Security number and other personal information. After divulging this information, the victim is often told that the entire matter can be instantly dismissed by paying a fine. All the victim needs to do is provide a credit card or checking account routing number.

By the time the call ends, the scammer has all the information necessary to open lines of credit under the unsuspecting victim's name. Identity thieves can quickly empty the victim's bank accounts or run up staggering credit card bills.

As with many ploys to obtain consumers' personal information, it is likely that many of these identity thieves are actually thousands of miles away, often in other countries and out of reach of U.S. law enforcement. Under this scheme, criminals simply go through the phone book hoping that sooner or later someone will provide the sensitive information they need to steal an identity.

This ploy is particularly effective because it causes victims to react immediately out of fear, rather than taking the time to reflect about the information being requested. While citizens could face legal consequences for failing to respond to a valid jury summons, legitimate court officers would never leave threatening messages on someone's voicemail to demand personal information and immediate payment of a fine.

Consumers who receive such a call can verify whether they must appear for jury duty by calling their local courthouse or district court. Consumers should NEVER hand over personal information in response to an unsolicited telephone call or e-mail, no matter how legitimate it might appear.

For more information, contact the Office of the Attorney General at (800) 252-8011 or visit the Attorney General's Web site at www.oag.state.tx.us

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