



For comments or questions, contact the West Virginia Intelligence / Fusion Center by phone at 304.558.4831 or e-mail at wvfusion@wv.gov.

INTERNET BASED ROMANCE SCAMS ON THE RISE

The purpose of this snapshot is to highlight the prevalence of and bring awareness to romance scams, which have been on the rise in the United States. Romance scams prey on unsuspecting victims and often involve manipulation for monetary gain. The internet serves as an ideal medium for these scammers due to the innate ability to veil your identity that the internet provides.

The West Virginia Intelligence / Fusion Center urges citizens utilizing social media to be aware of personal information publicly viewable on the internet. Please do not send money or personal information to people that you do not know, or accounts with which you are not familiar.



Overview

Numerous West Virginians have fallen prey to romance scammers operating on the internet. Though anyone can fall victim to these cyber criminals, their targets tend to be:

- Women
- 30-55 Years of Age
- Active on Social Media and/or Dating Websites

Victims believe they are romantically involved with the perpetrator, who is skillful in using the publicly available information on the victims profile to establish common interests and ultimately gain the trust and/ or sympathy of the victim. Once trust is established, the perpetrator requests financial assistance.

Victims who provide the requested monetary assistance to scammers are often placed on a “suckers list,” which is posted online to be exploited by other criminals.

Every year Americans are scammed out of millions of dollars. This money is often used for illicit purposes and often not able to be recovered.

Recent Incidents in West Virginia.

- One individual utilizing an online dating website fell victim to a perpetrator portraying an oil rig worker. The perpetrator convinced the victim that he needed money for food and travel and would pay it back when he returned to town.
- A scammer impersonating a U.S. Army soldier on deployment told a victim that he needed funds for leave.

Do Not Become a Victim

In order to ensure that you do not become a victim to romance scams, you are encouraged to consider and follow the below tips:

- Research those you are interacting with to ensure that their photos have not been used elsewhere.
- Do not send money to anyone that you do not know personally.
- Do not send or provide information or photos that could be used to exploit you in the future.

Common Romance Scam Red Flags

Below is a list of **Red Flags** commonly associated with these scams:

- Perpetrator quickly suggests using an instant messaging application to communicate.
- Social media profile where contact was first established will be deleted.
- Promises to meet in person, but consistently has elaborate excuses as to why he or she is unavailable.
- Claims that meeting is destiny or fate.
- Immediately asks for photo and/or offers photos of themselves. The photos offered have been fraudulently obtained and are used to hasten the establishment of trust.
- Quickly asks for an address to send gifts, such as flowers or candy.
- Asks for help (often monetary) with an “emergency” that popped up.
- Within 48 hours perpetrators will often claim to love you.

