



## Yuma County Sheriff's Office

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# PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## Stop! Don't be the Victim of a Gift Card Scam

**Location of Incident:** Yuma, AZ

The Yuma County Sheriff's Office (YCSO) is launching a new "Stop Gift Card Scams" campaign and will be distributing point-of-purchase warning signs for gift card displays to area businesses that sell gift cards.

According to the Federal Trade Commission, the top fraud of 2020 and 2021 was imposter scams. Scammers claiming to be government officials, representatives of known businesses, or a dear family member, defrauded people of \$2.3 billion in 2021—up from \$1.2 billion in 2020. Initial contact by these scammers can occur by phone, email or a webpage pop-up alert, and mostly target seniors, our most vulnerable population. The scammers scare or pressure the victim into acting quickly so they don't have time to think or talk to someone they trust. They may ask the victim to wire money to them, but more often these days, the scammers will ask the victim to buy gift cards to pay for 'fines, services, taxes,' etc.



Gift cards are the #1 payment method of choice for scammers because they are easy to find and buy, and they have fewer protections for buyers compared to some other payment options. The scammer will ask the victim to go to a particular store or stores near them to buy the gift cards. After the victim buys the gift cards, the scammer will demand the gift card number and PIN on the back of the card, which allows them get the money that was loaded onto the card immediately. And just like that, the victim's money is gone.

With this in mind, the YCSO believes that it is time to approach gift card scams from a different perspective, and that is to educate and gain the cooperation of local area businesses that sell gift cards or provide any type of service to wire money. By reaching out to local area businesses for participation in the Stop Gift Card Scams campaign, businesses can become a key asset in stopping gift card scams in progress.

Here is a list of common gift card scams:

- **Jury duty scam:** The caller pretends to be someone from the courthouse who claims that you failed to report for jury duty and a warrant has been issued for your arrest. You are then offered a choice to either pay the warrant or have an officer sent over to arrest you. The scammer will demand that the fine be paid by money transfer or by gift card.
- **Warrant scam:** You get a phone call from someone posing as a law enforcement officer who claims you have an outstanding warrant. The scammers may even use names of local officers in order to make the scam seem legitimate. They will instruct you to wire funds or pay by gift card to clear the warrant.
- **IRS scam:** The caller says they are from the IRS and that you have to pay taxes or a fine. They will instruct you to wire funds or pay by gift card.
- **Tech Support scam:** Someone calls from tech support, maybe saying they're from Apple or Microsoft, saying there is something wrong with your computer.
- **Romance scam:** You meet someone special on a dating website, but then they need money and ask you to help them. This romance scammer makes up any story to trick you into sending them gift cards.
- **Grandparent scam:** The caller pretends to be a friend or family member in an emergency and asks you to send money right away—but not tell anyone. This is a scam. If you are worried, hang up and call your friend or relative to check that everything is all right.
- **Lottery scam:** The caller says you have won a prize but first, you have to pay fees or other charges with a gift card. Remember, no honest business or agency will ever make you pay with a gift card. Also, did you even enter that sweepstakes?
- **Utility scam:** The caller says they are from your power company, or another utility company. They tell you to pay your bill by gift card immediately or they will cut off your service. Utility companies do not work that way.
- **Fake check scam:** You get a check from someone buying something from you, probably online, for way more than you expected. They tell you to deposit the check and then give them the difference on a gift card. However, that check will be fake and you will be out all that money.

The Yuma County Sheriff's Office would like to remind the public that no legitimate business, government, or law enforcement agency would ever call you demanding payment with a gift card.

Remember, gift cards are for **gifts**, not for payments. Anytime someone demands to be paid with a gift card, it is always a scam.

If your business is interested in partnering with the YCSO in this worthwhile program, or if you have any questions, please contact the Sheriff's Office of Volunteers at (928) 819-2212 or send an email to [SOWebmaster@ycso.yumacountyaz.gov](mailto:SOWebmaster@ycso.yumacountyaz.gov).

We may not be able to stop all of the scammers, but together we can help prevent more people from becoming their victims.

**Information Released By:** Tania Pavlak, Public Affairs Specialist