

Sheriff's office warns of new phone scam

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The Del Norte County Sheriff's Office dispatch center received numerous calls last week from panicked Del Norte County citizens reporting they received a call on their cell phone from their daughter or granddaughters screaming for help before a forceful male voice joins the call demanding money in exchange for the life of their loved one.

In some cases, the alleged kidnapper will know their loved ones' names or say they are calling from the state where their loved ones live.

These calls are part of a scamming scheme that are becoming more widespread with technological advancements over the last several years, the sheriff's office reported.

After obtaining mobile phone contact lists, scammers use a technique called "spoofing" to disguise incoming calls to appear as if it is coming from a different number. This can be an out-of-area number (many recent reports in this area advise calls are coming from +51 international numbers), but if they have access to enough information, they can make it appear like these calls are coming from your loved one's phone numbers.

The DNSO is asking everyone to share this information, as spreading awareness helps prevent more people from falling victim to these scamming schemes.

From DNSO reports, it appears many of these calls are targeting elderly residents, so make sure to advise elderly family, friends and neighbors as well.

The best way to avoid these scams is to avoid taking calls from unknown numbers. However, if you believe you may be a victim of a virtual kidnapping scam, the FBI offers the following tips:

- Stay calm and try to slow things down. Don't share information about yourself or your relatives.
- Ask to speak directly to the victim. Ask: "How do I know my loved one is okay?"

- Ask the kidnapped victim to call back from his or her cellphone. If the victim speaks, ask questions to which only he or she would know the answers.
- If you can't speak to the victim, if it is pertinent, ask the caller to describe the vehicle the victim drives.
- While on the line with the caller, try to call the victim from another phone or via text or social media.
- To buy time, repeat the caller's request and say you are writing it down. Or say you need time to get things moving.
- Don't challenge or argue with the caller. Keep your voice low and steady.

If you receive one of these calls, file a report with the FBI and provide as much information as you can, including the phone number if you have it.

To file a report with the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center, go to www.ic3.gov.