

## BBB Alert: Senior Citizens Nationwide Report Losing Thousands of Dollars to Telephone Scam

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Austin, Texas, October 14, 2008 - Better Business Bureau is warning senior citizens to be aware of an emerging telephone scam that is preying on grandparents nationwide. BBB has recently received reports about grandparents from California to New Hampshire who thought they were aiding their grandchildren by providing money for an emergency situation but were in fact giving thousands of dollars to Canadian con artists.

Generally, the scam works like this - the grandparent receives a distressed phone call from someone they believe to be their grandchild. The supposed grandchild typically explains that they are traveling in Canada and have been arrested or involved in an auto accident and need the grandparent to wire money to post bail or pay for damages-usually amounting to a few thousand dollars. While many seniors have reported the scam without falling prey to it, unfortunately, many others have been victimized. One well-meaning grandmother sent \$15,000 to scammers thinking she was helping a grandchild who had been in an auto accident.

"This scam is just despicable because it preys on the emotions of seniors who want nothing more than to ensure the safety of their grandchildren," says Carrie A. Hurt, President and CEO of BBB serving Central, Coastal and Southwest Texas. "The key to avoiding this scam is to remain calm despite the 'emergency' nature of the call and to verify the identity of the caller. Too often people are allowing themselves to get caught up in the false sense of urgency, and they end up making emotional, instead of logical, decisions."

Given the sudden pervasiveness of the scam, several state Attorneys General have issued warnings. In addition, the Canadian Anti-Fraud Call Centre is reporting a significant increase in complaints for this scam. In 2007, the Centre received 128 complaints about this type of scam; since the beginning of this year, nearly 350 complaints have been filed, and about half were filed in July and August alone.

Law enforcement officials are not certain how perpetrators are obtaining phone numbers for so many senior citizens across the U.S. However, it is believed that scammers are most likely calling random numbers until they happen to reach a senior citizen. The scammers' basic tactic is to pose as a grandchild and let the unsuspecting grandparent fill in the blanks. For example, the scam caller might say, "It's me, your favorite grandchild," to which the grandparent will guess the name of the grandchild it sounds the most like, and then the call proceeds from there.

To protect themselves from this scam, and other scams that may use a distressed loved-one tactic, BBB is advising seniors to confirm the status of the individual by calling them directly or verifying the story with other family members before taking any further action.

BBB also advises that any request to wire money through Western Union or MoneyGram should be seen as a "red flag" and an immediate tip-off that the call may be part of a scam. Funds sent via wire transfer are hard to track once received by scammers and are usually not recoverable by law enforcement or banking officials.

For anyone victimized by this type of distressed loved-one call, BBB recommends reporting the incident immediately to local police departments and state Attorneys General offices. If there is a request to wire money to Canada, the Canadian Anti-Fraud Call Centre has established the PhoneBusters hotline and website to report such fraud. Reports can be filed easily online through the PhoneBusters site at: [www.phonebusters.com](http://www.phonebusters.com), or by phone toll free at 1-888-495-8501.

For more information from BBB on common scams and advice on avoiding consumer fraud, go to [www.bbb.org](http://www.bbb.org).  
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