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Valentine's Day Romance Scams



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—This Valentine's Day, Attorney General Ashley Moody is warning Floridians about romance scams. Consumers lost more than $1 billion nationwide last year to romance scams involving social media, dating apps and email schemes. Attorney General Moody is also warning Floridians that social media information could be used by a scammer to defraud citizens.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, “Romance scams cost Americans more than a billion dollars last year, so be cautious when looking for love online. This Valentine’s Day, I am providing tips and resources for Floridians searching for companionship online, to help them avoid heartbreak and fraud.”

The number of online-dating users in the U.S. nearly doubled from 24.5 million in 2021 to 44.2 million in 2022. With this massive increase, it is no surprise that scammers flood these apps, hoping to find potential victims. The Federal Bureau of Investigation reports that the majority of victims are women over the age of 50, but new methods, including fraudulent TikTok accounts, are being used to target younger victims. Even U.S. military members fall victim, reporting losses of approximately $92 million between 2017 and 2021.

Look out for the following red flags of romance scammers while communicating with potential dating matches:

- A match attempting to establish a bond very quickly, even asking for marriage not long into a relationship;
- Someone who asks personal questions of a target, but avoiding answering personal questions about themselves;
- A match that forgets important details, since some scammers have multiple victims on the hook at once and important relationship details are muddied or totally forgotten; and
- Refuses to meet in person, talk on the phone or engage in video chat conversations.

If a scammer is successful in developing a trusting relationship, victims might be pressured to not only reveal personal and financial information, but may also be used to launder stolen money, transport drugs or stolen goods, or even help to scam other targets. Just last month, a romance scammer from Florida took advantage of an elderly Holocaust survivor—stealing the victim's entire life savings while the scammer lived in luxury. Many victims are extorted after sending promiscuous photos and videos to swindle a sweetheart.

Reports show that more than 302 million people in the United States used social media in 2022. Anyone's social media pictures and profile information could be used in a romance scam. Scammers take photos from people's social media profiles for use in making fake accounts. News stories highlight how someone's social media pictures are used by scammers to defraud another victim. This podcast tells the story of a man whose photos were used to dupe women on dating apps all over the world, resulting in anger-fueled, real-world interactions from seemingly random women. The likeness of military members are often exploited by scammers to create fraudulent dating app accounts since deployment may not allow for victims to notice that their identity is being used.

Avoid falling victim to romance scams by following these tips:

- Consider making social media accounts private, and be wary of direct message request from unknown users;
- Only talk with verified users on dating apps. Dating sites will have a user take photos of themselves and send them in for review so dating companies can verify that the photos sent in match the user's images posted on a dating app profile;
- Do online research by checking social media profiles and checking a name to find out if a user's story seems to be real;
- Ask detailed questions and pay attention to see if answers seem suspicious or go against prior information given;
- Offer to meet in person, somewhere public surrounded by people to be safe;
- Ask a friend or family member for advice on a potential relationship—often another pair of eyes can see through deceit; and
- Think twice before sending promiscuous photos or videos to online users as they may be used for extortion purposes.

For more information about romance scams, view Attorney General Moody's *Scams at a Glance: Swindling Sweethearts* brochure by clicking here.

To view *Scams at a Glance: Swindling Sweethearts* brochure in Spanish, click here.

To report romance scams, contact the FBI’s Internet Crime Complaint Center by clicking here or by visiting the Federal Trade Commission’s Report Fraud website here.