



Employees' Retirement System Communicator

November 2012

No. 11

From the Desk of the ERS Manager

Hello Milwaukee County Retirees!

Hope you all had a wonderful Thanksgiving! With this holiday, we are reminded of all we have to be thankful for. As the County's ERS Manager, I am thankful for the opportunity to serve the County as well as having the strong support of the Pension Board and a great ERS staff. This enables us to serve you - our retirees - day in and day out.

As the year winds down and we put our year end activity list together, there are a couple of things to watch for. First, the 1099s we send you each year will have a new look for 2013! A sample form will be included in next month's newsletter. Secondly, the 2013 budget process is near completion, and any health plan changes will be communicated soon. Lastly, ERS experiences an increase in calls from retirees with life insurance coverage who receive W2s. We'll include an overview of why we need to issue those in the next *Communicator*.

Please call our office at any of the numbers listed in the shaded box to the left if you have questions regarding your pension or healthcare benefits. We are here to help!

May your heart be filled with joy this holiday season.

Marian Ninneman
ERS Manager

Financial Scams Against Seniors

By Vivian Aikin

Financial scams targeting seniors have become so prevalent that they're now considered one of the fastest-growing forms of elder abuse in the U. S. Why? Seniors are often thought to have significant assets: money sitting in checking or savings accounts, a "nest egg" of retirement funds, a home with a paid off mortgage, and/or excellent credit. A study by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) highlighted characteristics of people older than 50 that make them potential victims of financial abuse. In general, they expect honesty in their dealings with others, are less likely to take action when defrauded and are less knowledgeable about their rights in an increasingly complex marketplace. All of these factors combine to make them attractive targets of unscrupulous individuals.

Broadly defined, elder financial abuse is when someone illegally or improperly uses a vulnerable senior's money or other property. Elder financial abuse spans a wide spectrum of conduct. The top three financial exploitation problems identified by experts are:

- Theft or diversion of funds or property by family members
- Theft or diversion of funds or property by caregivers
- Financial scams perpetrated by strangers

Contact Information

Employees' Retirement System

From the Milwaukee
area: 414-278-4207
Toll Free: 877-652-6377
Email: ers@milwcnty.com.

Life & Health Benefits

Phone: 414-278-4198.
Email: bene-fits@milwcnty.com

New Retirees

Merlin Avery
Lori Boston
Mary Brister
Arletha Carroll
Linda Cieslik
Dennis Collins
Jeffrey Corstvet
Dianne Gieryn
Gregg Herman
Mildred Hyde-Demoze
Carl Lacy
Jean Larscheidt
Katherine Moran
Sharlyn Maas
Mary Kathryn
Martinez
Russell Mewhorter
Kenneth Mohr
Shawn Niessen

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Perpetrators target seniors that they perceive to be vulnerable: those that are isolated, lonely, physically or mentally disabled, unfamiliar with handling their own finances or have recently lost a spouse. They often pose as trustworthy helpers. They can be strangers (such as telemarketers and tradespeople) or have a relationship with the targeted victim (friends, family members, doctors, lawyers, accountants and paid or volunteer caregivers). Abusers that are family members often have money troubles that may be worsened by gambling, substance abuse issues or unemployment

To protect yourself or a loved one from financial abuse, become familiar with the most common scams and learn what to do if you suspect foul play. Listed below are some of the most prevalent scams.

The Grandparents Scheme

This scam is especially devious in its simplicity. A call is placed to the unsuspecting grandparent and the caller identifies himself as a grandson in some kind of trouble, using a friend's phone and needing cash. The caller may say, "Hey Grandma, it's your favorite grandson and I'm in trouble". The concerned grandparent blurts out "Dan, is that you?" The fake grandchild responds "yes" and asks for money to be wired via Western Union or MoneyGram since they don't always require identification to collect. At the same time, the scammer will beg the grandparent "please don't tell my parents; they would kill me."

The senior should challenge this story and chances are the caller will hang up.

Fake Lottery/Sweepstakes

This scam is usually perpetrated by mail. The two most common variations are "pay to play" or "You've won; here's your check!" The first ploy entices the senior to buy something (magazine subscriptions for example) in order to have their name entered into a contest. In the second case, the senior receives an authentic-looking check with notification they've already won the lottery in Jamaica, Nigeria or another foreign country. The "winner" is then required to wire back a share of their "winnings" for taxes or administrative fees. The check will initially clear the bank but later prove to be counterfeit.

It is illegal for a company to require you to buy anything to enter a sweepstakes; to do so is a giveaway that the offer is a scam.

Discount or Counterfeit Prescription Scam

By phone, scammers offer seniors prescription drugs at 50% off. The catch is a "membership fee" of \$200 or more to join the discount "club" – payable by credit card, of course. This type of offer also turns up on the Internet. The results are the same. The senior provides credit card information and, in return, either receives nothing or, even worse, counterfeit or herbal generic replacements that may be unsafe.

Seniors should be dubious of these offers. There are agencies in most states that maintain a list of reputable discount drug programs. Always check first.

Charity Scams ("Help for Haiti")

In this scenario, money is solicited for fake charities particularly after well-publicized natural disasters like earthquakes, hurricanes or tsunamis. Polite door-to-door or phone solicitors ask for donations on behalf of any

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number of charitable organizations. They may also purport to be soliciting for funds for the Red Cross.

Say “no thanks” to these offers. A better option is giving charitable contributions directly to the local Red Cross (www.redcross.org) or other established charity.

Credit Card Company Fraud Call or Email

A senior receives a call or legitimate looking email supposedly from their credit card company. The caller or emailer is very convincing and may even identify the last four digits of the credit card as proof. The alleged purpose of the call or email is to check on a possible fraudulent purchase. The senior denies making the purchase and the scammer offers to reverse the charge immediately. He just needs the three or four digit verification code on the back of your credit card.

NEVER give this information to anyone unless you have initiated the conversation. The scammer may have gotten hold of your credit card number but still need the verification code to complete the scheme. If you receive a call or email of this nature, do not respond. Instead call your credit card issuer immediately using the phone number on the back of your card and report what has happened. The credit card company may recommend you cancel and replace the card as a precaution.

Medicare/Health Insurance Fraud

Every U. S. citizen age 65 or older qualifies for Medicare. Because it is universal, Medicare is easier for scammers to target than private insurance. People posing as Medicare representatives may try to persuade seniors to reveal personal information. Or they may provide bogus services for elderly people at makeshift “mobile” clinics in order to get their information, bill Medicare and pocket the money. Medical equipment manufacturers may offer seniors free medical products in exchange for their Medicare numbers. Because a physician has to sign a form certifying that equipment or testing is needed before Medicare pays for it, con artists fake signatures or bribe dishonest doctors to sign the forms. Once a signature is in place, unethical manufacturers bill Medicare for merchandise that was not needed or was not ordered.

Avoid signing blank insurances claim forms. Ask your medical providers what they will charge and what you will be expected to pay out-of-pocket. Carefully review your explanation of benefits statements raising questions if something does not look “right”.

Funeral/Cemetery Scams

Disreputable funeral homes try to capitalize on family members' lack of familiarity with funeral costs to add unnecessary charges to the bill. As an example, an unscrupulous funeral director will insist that a casket, one of the most expensive parts of funeral services, is necessary even when performing a direct cremation that can be done with a cardboard casket rather than an expensive model.

In another type of fraud, scammers read obituaries and attend the funeral service of a complete stranger to take advantage of the grieving widow or widower. These individuals appear compassionate and caring in order to ingratiate themselves into the surviving family's good graces. Later, claiming that the deceased had an outstanding debt with them, the scammer will try to extort money from relatives to settle the fake debts.

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It's important to understand the difference between funeral home basic fees for professional services and any fees for additional or extra services. Do not sign anything until all your questions have been answered and you carefully read the documents you are asked to sign. It may be a good idea to ask a trusted family member or friend for assistance during an emotional time. Do not allow yourself to be pressured into making purchases, signing contracts or committing funds.

According to Richard Cordray, director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the amount of money stolen from seniors has risen sharply in recent years. In recent remarks, Cordray cited a 2009 study by MetLife that found Americans aged 60 and above were cheated out of at least \$2.9 billion in 2010, a 12% increase from 2008. Another survey by the nonprofit Investor Protection Trust said that one out of every five Americans over the age of 65 had been financially swindled in 2010 and called elder financial abuse a national epidemic.

Living in the post-Bernie Madoff era, stories seem to surface almost weekly about seniors bilked out of their money by a new scam. We would all do well to remember what U. S. President Ronald Reagan told his Soviet counterpart, Mikhail Gorbachev, at the 1987 signing of a nuclear weapons treaty with the Soviet Union: "Trust, but verify".

New Retirees (Continued)

<i>Janet Oglesby</i>	<i>Verlee Taylor</i>
<i>Chandradeep Singhal</i>	<i>Dorothy Truvillion</i>
<i>Kathleen Stockheimer</i>	<i>Robert Werner</i>
<i>Braxton Townsend</i>	<i>Jacqueline Wigley</i>

In Memoriam

Please keep the families of these recently deceased retirees and spouses in your thoughts:

<i>Marion Atlee</i>	<i>Madelynn Fayne</i>	<i>Frances Millonzi</i>	<i>Gertrude Rozek</i>
<i>Byron Berg</i>	<i>Edna Hanson</i>	<i>(Frank)</i>	<i>Ronald Sanders</i>
<i>Deloris Buchanan</i>	<i>Walter Kroupa</i>	<i>Myron Minko</i>	<i>Donald Schultz</i>
<i>Mary Burke</i>	<i>Gustave Lamelas</i>	<i>Richard Pisarski</i>	<i>Kathleen Stark</i>
<i>Paul Ciardo</i>	<i>Donovan Lee</i>	<i>Carlos Rios</i>	<i>Phyllis Vitucci</i>
<i>James Cuda</i>	<i>Patricia Makens</i>	<i>Rita Risse</i>	
<i>James Eschenbach</i>	<i>Rosemarie McDowell</i>	<i>Robert Roberts</i>	