



For Immediate Release  
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## Crime Prevention Tip of the Month- Internet Safety

Harrisonburg, VA – The Harrisonburg Police Department (HPD) will be providing Monthly Crime Prevention tips starting this month and continuing throughout the year. The purposes of these releases are to maximize public awareness and educate citizens about potential crime trends and ways to combat becoming a victim. This month’s crime prevention tip revolves around Internet Safety.

The Internet places a vast amount of information and exciting experiences at our fingertips. With the click of a mouse, the Internet allows the purchase of airline tickets, stock market options, sending flowers to a friend and many more opportunities that provide convenience to all who use it. In a world of social media and increasing technological advancement, also comes the opportunity for criminals to scam users leaving them with security breaches and monetary losses. The following internet safety tips will help you protect yourself, your neighbors, loved ones, finances, and ultimately your community.

### Common Internet Crimes

#### **Fraud**

Due to the size of the Internet, potential markets, relative ease, and low cost to criminals, fraud is one of the most common forms of Internet crimes. The Internet’s promise of substantial consumer benefits is coupled with the potential for fraud and deception. An experienced fraud artist can create and maintain a site on the Internet to solicit users anywhere in the world. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is a civil law enforcement agency that issues administrative complaints and files federal lawsuits for redress of victims.

#### **Unsolicited E-mails**

Internet service providers report handling over 60 million electronic messages every day; one third of which are estimated to be Unsolicited Commercial E-mails. The ever increasing volume of these messages threatens the security of internet users. Many of these e-mails are misleading and deceptive. Beware of “get rich quick” schemes and unsolicited employment opportunities. If a deal seems too good to be true, it probably is.



### **Online Purchasing and Auctions**

With the convenience and ability to purchase items from books and music to automobiles also comes the potential for criminals to scam users every day. Websites like EBay and Craigslist may sometimes expect users to pay in advance for merchandise that is never delivered or even existed. Users may be in communication with a potential seller and then be asked to provide personal information or provide bank numbers. Recently, HPD has seen an increase in subjects being asked to go to another location and purchase cards and load money onto them. These deals are almost always scams. If you are asked to wire or transfer money prior to receiving merchandise, beware of the potential monetary loss and personal security breaches.

### **The Hijack**

Another increasing Internet crime is a relatively new form of fraud. Users are prompted to download a "viewer program" or "Pay an Overdue Bill" with the threat of having their services terminated. Once the user has clicked on this link or downloads the program, the user's computer is "hijacked" by the criminal, providing them with remote access. Criminals can then turn off modems, disconnect the Internet from the local provider, dial international numbers, and take the user to a remote website. The international costs can be very expensive and are charged to the victim's telephone bill until turned off.

### **Child Exploitation**

Children and teenage Internet users are at great risk with today's technological opportunities. These users can be sexually exploited, solicited, and kidnapped by predators through online services. One reason for this is the anonymous nature of the Internet; another is the high volume of users. Pedophiles contact children through social media and other resources while posing as anything other than who they are. Pedophiles may request children to send them photographs and offer them money, or pose as professional photographers to obtain images. The mentalities these criminals have to prey on children reduce the inhibitions of the child through deception which may lead to other sexual conversations and acts.

### **How to Prevent Becoming a Victim**

- Chose an online service that offers parental controls
- Monitor children that are online, or have them use the Internet in rooms where other people are, not alone in other locations of the home
- Educate your children on the importance of not talking to people they do not know and providing personal information
- Become familiar with the services and social media sites your child uses
- Never allow your child to arrange a face-to-face meeting with anyone they do not know or a new friend your child may have met online



- Remember that not everything you read or see on the Internet is true
- If a deal seems too good to be true, it probably is
- Never provide banking or personal information online
- Research sites that you utilize and their validity
- Unsolicited e-mails are almost always scams
- If someone asks you to send money or transfer funds, terminate communication with that person
- Use a secure Internet browser that will scramble or encrypt your personal information
- Update your virus protection regularly
- When discarding old computers, erase the hard-drive to remove your personal data
- Utilize your police department when you have questions or feel like a situation may not be legitimate or feel like you are being scammed

The Harrisonburg Police Department takes Internet crimes very seriously. Remembering tips like these could prevent you from becoming a victim. If you feel like you have been the victim of an Internet crime, or have information that can assist officers with these crimes, contact your local police department. Report suspicious behaviors and remember that you never really know who you are talking to on the other side of an online communication. For any additional information or questions, please contact HPD's Crime Prevention Officer at **(540) 437-2672**.

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