



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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Press Release

DA Morrissey warns not to use gift cards to pay debts

But if you did before reading this, here is how to cancel them

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New guidance pushed out by the Federal Trade Commission last week says that telephone scammers are trying to dupe their targets into submitting payments using gift cards more than ever, and that overall losses continue to rise.

"We have seen these reports coming in to local police departments, substantiating what is being seen federally," District Attorney Michael W. Morrissey said. The FTC reported tracking \$148 million in fraud in the first 9 months of 2021 – more than the total of all of 2020.

"The scams involve callers targeting unwitting people by pretending to be from the IRS, the Social Security Administration, a judicial official or common bank or business," District Attorney Morrissey said. "They claim that there is some immediate consequence, like an arrest warrant or fine, if payment is not made instantly – then they tell their target that the fastest way to pay is to buy gift cards and read those numbers over the phone."

The catch, according to Morrissey and law enforcement nationwide, is that legitimate companies never, ever do that. "In the heat of the moment, if the caller's threats make your adrenaline kick in and that warps your decision process, many have been tricked into complying," he said.

Scammers are leaning hard on common brands like Target, Apple, Walmart, Google Play, and eBay gift cards.

While some companies, like eBay and Google Play need to be contacted through their online customer support mechanisms, some of the most commonly misused brands have toll free numbers for immediate help, including: iTunes at 888-275-2273 (say "gift card" to connect to a live person); Target at 1-800-544-2943; and Amazon at 1-888-280-4331.

Even if a consumer only realizes that they have been duped after they have read the gift card number to the person on the other end of the phone, if that consumer reaches the company before the card has been redeemed, the funds can often be frozen and eventually refunded to them. Having the card in and the original receipt is important in that process.