



NEWS RELEASE

HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF POLICE OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

For Release: October 29, 2003

Contact: Sherry Llewellyn
Cpl. Lisa Myers
(410) 313-2236

Howard County Police Warn of Scam Operation Following Recent Report *Elderly Victims Often Targeted in Fraud Cases*

Howard County Police are warning citizens to be aware of scam and fraud operations that often are committed against elderly victims. In one recent case, an 85-year-old woman was bilked out of thousands of dollars after being the victim of a scam at the Columbia Mall.

In the recent case, which occurred Oct. 17, the elderly victim was approached by a woman as she walked from the Lord & Taylor department store into the mall. The woman told the victim that her car had been struck in the parking garage and offered to walk with her outside to see the damage. While the victim examined the vehicle, which was not damaged, the suspect claimed to discover a bag of money in the garage. The suspect offered to share the money with the victim and both entered the victim's car. The two drove to a nearby office building where the suspect claimed her "boss" would count the money and give them guidance on what to do.

The suspect exited the car, entered the office building, returned and told the victim that the bag contained \$75,000. The victim then spoke to the "boss," a man, on the female suspect's cell phone. The man advised the victim that they could share the money, but that the victim had to put up \$12,500 to cover taxes and other expenses before she could receive her share. He also asked her for personal information, including her name, social security number, address, phone number, date of birth and bank account information, for "tax purposes." The victim agreed to go to her bank to withdraw available cash and take out an additional cash advance.

The female suspect advised the victim that she would also need to turn over her jewelry to cover remaining expenses. The victim complied, but then grew suspicious. She asked the suspect to return her money and jewelry and exit the car. The suspect asked to be driven to a shopping center in Columbia and said she would leave the bag of money and jewelry. The victim dropped the suspect off and discovered the bag to be filled with scrap paper. The money and jewelry have not been recovered and police do not have a good description of the suspect. Detectives are contacting nearby jurisdictions to determine if similar cases have occurred.

Police typically receive reports of this type of scam operation once or twice a year, but believe many cases may go unreported. Investigators remind all citizens that they should never provide personal information to anyone, whether in-person or over the phone. Seniors are reminded to never let unknown people into their homes or vehicles, even if the people claim that they are working for a utility company or say they need assistance. Seniors who are approached by a suspicious person, visited by a stranger at home or called by someone requesting personal information should contact police immediately. For more information about the prevention of fraud and identity theft, citizens can visit the Howard County Police Department's Web site at www.hcpd.org.

###