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Virtual kidnapping for ransom scam targets Humboldt County residents



Humboldt County residents are once again being targeted by a virtual kidnapping for ransom scam.

This month a local resident reported to Sheriff's deputies that he received multiple calls from a phone number out of Mexico. The number left voicemails for the resident that contained a child crying and then a subject demanding ransom be paid to free the child.

According to the FBI, this type of scam has been circulating the United States for at least two decades and can cause victims to lose thousands of dollars.

The success of any type of virtual kidnapping scheme depends on speed and fear. To avoid becoming a victim, look for these possible indicators:

- Callers go to great lengths to keep you on the phone, insisting you remain on the line.
- Calls do not come from the supposed victim's phone.
- Callers try to prevent you from contacting the "kidnapped" victim.
- Calls include demands for ransom money to be paid via wire transfer to Mexico.

If you receive a phone call from someone demanding a ransom for an alleged kidnap victim, the following should be considered:

- In most cases, the best course of action is to hang up the phone.
- If you do engage the caller, don't call out your loved one's name.
- Try to slow the situation down. Request to speak to your family member directly. Ask, "How do I know my loved one is okay?"
- Ask questions only the alleged kidnap victim would know, such as the name of a pet. Avoid sharing information about yourself or your family.
- Listen carefully to the voice of the alleged victim if they speak.
- Attempt to contact the alleged victim via phone, text, or social media, and request that they call back from their cell phone.

- To buy time, repeat the caller's request and tell them you are writing down the demand, or tell the caller you need time to get things moving.
- Don't agree to pay a ransom, by wire or in person. Delivering money in person can be dangerous.

If you suspect a real kidnapping is taking place or you believe a ransom demand is a scheme, contact your local law enforcement immediately.

Scam prevention tips provided by the FBI. To find out more information regarding fraud scams and schemes, visit [fbi.gov](https://www.fbi.gov) or [consumer.ftc.gov](https://www.consumer.ftc.gov)