



Money Mule Scams: Don't Help the Criminals!

What is a Money Mule Scam? A money mule scam is one in which an unsuspecting or unwilling victim is either forced or is tricked into transferring money for a criminal enterprise. These scams come in many shapes and forms, so be on the lookout!

Money Mule Scam – Forced: Often, the victim is forced into transferring the money because they were a victim of a scam themselves. Somehow, they were tricked by the scammer into sending them money. Then, the victim is told that they can get their money back if they transfer funds for the scammer. This scam often snowballs, as after the victim has transferred illegal funds, that illegal act can be held against them. The scammer can threaten to turn the victim into the police if they don't continue to transfer money.

Laundering Scam – Tricked: In other forms of the scam, the victim has no idea they are breaking the law, as they think they are taking part in a new job, taking the steps to claim a prize, or helping out a friend or love interest. Scammers advertise job opportunities in which the potential victim can work from home, transferring funds for the “employer” and earning a paycheck. In reality, this paycheck is a portion of stolen, fraudulent funds, and the victim is helping to launder the rest of the money.

In other forms of this scam, the victim is notified of a prize they have won. They are sent a sum of money, then they are asked to transfer some of the funds back as payment for taxes or transfer fees. In reality though, they have just accepted payment for laundering fraudulent funds.

The last form of the “tricked” laundering scam, an online love interest or friend has been sending the victim money, asking them to deposit it in their own account. The reasons given are varied, but the scammer often claims that they are attempting to avoid taxes, are trying to move their money to the states, or are simply giving a gift. Whatever the reason, they will soon

request that the victim send some or all of the funds back to the scammer, usually via wire transfer or through gift cards.

Are Money Mule Scams a Problem? Yes, absolutely. If you are found to be part of a money mule scheme, you could be tried as an accessory to the crime. You could also be held liable for any lost funds by your financial institution. If you've shared your account information with the scammer, they could use it to steal the rest of your assets, open accounts in your name, open lines of credit, or anything else they want.

What Should You Do? Always keep the maxim in mind, "if it sounds too good to be true, it is." Opportunities, relationships, or jobs that sound like they are all upsides with no downsides don't really exist, they are scams! Beyond the golden rule, you should also follow these rules:

1. Don't accept a job that requires you to transfer money independently. No reputable business would ask you to transfer money through your personal accounts on their behalf, nor will they ask you to open an account on behalf of the "business."
2. Never pay money to get a prize. Any time money is requested to claim a prize or some type of winnings, it is a scam!
3. If you are pressured by someone who has stolen from you to transfer money, contact the police immediately. You could be tried as an accessory if you go through with the money transfer.
4. Don't ever send money to an online love interest or friend, even if they have sent you money first. You'll soon discover that the money they sent you either bounces out of your account or has been stolen from other victims. If you are found to be in possession of stolen property, you could be charged for the theft. If you sent the scammer your own money, you will likely never see it again.

For more information on money mule scams, check out the FTC's Consumer Advice website: <https://consumer.ftc.gov/consumer-alerts/2020/03/whats-money-mule-scam>

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