



## Fake Check Scam

### Scam Overview

Fake checks might look like business or personal checks, cashier's checks, money orders, or a check delivered electronically. Here's what to know about fake check scams.

### Details of the Fake Check Scam

We recognize the importance and urgency of this scam due to our recent partnership with Vectra Bank. This scam is often spotted by bank personnel while a senior citizen is in the process of initiating a wire transfer. Before we get into the details of the scam, we wanted to share with you an observation from bank personnel. Because the frequency of fake check/wire fraud scams is so high, bank personnel have been trained to spot red flags. They may delicately inquire about the nature of the transaction. While this questioning may come across as somewhat intrusive, please remember bank personnel have your best interest at heart and are simply leveraging their experience in dealing with bank scams.

In a fake check scam, a person you don't know asks you to deposit a check – sometimes for several thousand dollars, and usually for more than you are owed. They also ask you to send some of the money to another person. The scammers always have a good story to explain why you can't keep all the money. They might say they need you to cover taxes or fees, you need to buy supplies, or something else.

These scams work because fake checks generally look just like real checks, even to bank employees. They are often printed with the names and addresses of legitimate financial institutions. It can take weeks for a bank to figure out the check is fake.

By law, banks have to make deposited funds available quickly, usually within two days. **When the funds are made available in your account, the bank may say the check has "cleared," but that doesn't mean it's a good check.** Fake checks can take weeks to be discovered and untangled. By that time, the scammer has any money you sent, and you're stuck paying the money back to the bank.

## Red Flag Assessment

- **Never use money from a check to send gift cards, money orders, cryptocurrency, or to wire money to anyone who asks you to.** Many scammers demand that you buy gift cards and send them the PIN numbers, or buy cryptocurrency and transfer it to them, or send money through wire transfer services like Western Union or MoneyGram. Once you do, it's like you've given them cash. It's almost impossible to get it back.
- **Toss offers that ask you to pay for a prize.** If it's free, you shouldn't have to pay to get it. Only scammers will ask you to pay to collect a "free" prize.
- **Don't accept a check for more than the selling price.** You can bet it's a scam.

## What To Do If You Sent Money to a Scammer

Here are ways to try to get your money back, depending on how you paid a scammer.

- **Gift card.** Gift cards are for gifts, not payments. Anyone who demands payment by gift card is always a scammer. [If you paid a scammer with a gift card](#), tell the company that issued the card right away. When you contact the company, tell them the gift card was used in a scam. Ask them if they can refund your money. If you act quickly enough, the company might be able to get your money back. Also, tell the store where you bought the gift card as soon as possible.

[Here is a list of gift cards that scammers often use](#) – with information to help report a scam. If the card you used is not on this list, you might find the gift card company's contact information on the card itself. Otherwise, do some research online.

- **Wire transfer.** [If you wired money to a scammer](#), call the wire transfer company immediately to report the fraud and file a complaint. Reach the complaint department of MoneyGram at 1-800-MONEYGRAM (1-800-666-3947) or Western Union at 1-800-325-6000. Ask for the money transfer to be reversed. It's unlikely to happen, but it's important to ask.
- **Money order.** If you paid a scammer with a money order, contact the company that issued the money order right away to see if you can stop payment. Also, try to stop delivery of the money order. If you sent it by U.S. mail, contact the U.S. Postal Inspection Service at 877-876-2455. Otherwise, contact whatever delivery service you used as soon as possible.
- **Cryptocurrency.** If you paid with cryptocurrency, contact the company you used to send the money and tell them it was a fraudulent transaction. Ask to have the transaction reversed, if possible.