

Report shady businesses to new scam tracker

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With the help of technology, scam artists are enhancing their usual bag of tricks. For instance, some oily operators are not only impersonating the authorities, they're also manipulating caller ID systems to make it appear like they're phoning from police stations.

The watchdogs at the Better Business Bureau are trying to fight such tech-bolstered fraud with their own tools. The nonprofit - known for exposing patterns of shady deeds across the country - has launched a website where the public can report these types of shenanigans.

The idea of the scam tracker is to pool together, or crowdsource, suspicious incidents to warn others and make it easier for law enforcement to spot trends. To date, the website has fielded more than 13,000 reports, 800 of which originate from California.

Here's a sampling of consumer dispatches in Orange County within just the last month:

- One Laguna Niguel business owner reportedly lost \$10,000 last week to a website that promised access to a negative review about the business in exchange for personal information. "By the end I realized it was a scam," the poster writes.

- Here's a common one: Someone purporting to be from the utility company says you're behind on electricity payments. The caller is asking for money by tomorrow afternoon, or your power gets shut off. In this case, the homeowner had doubts about multiple missed payments and the

caller's request to pay only with a Moneygram. The complainant, who lives in North Tustin, hung up and called Southern California Edison to verify that the account was OK. Crisis averted.

The tracker began as an experiment in 2014 and was recently expanded to all U.S. states and Canada, thanks in part to a grant from Target, which fell victim itself last year to a widespread security breach.

Find the interactive map at bbb.org/scamtracker and give it a whirl: Filter by ZIP code or types of scams, and see hot spots across the country.

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