



Office of the  
Comptroller of the Currency

# SAFE MONEY

## GUARDING AGAINST FINANCIAL FRAUDS & SCAMS

### HOLIDAY & GIFT CARD SCAMS

**Holiday and gift card scams** are prevalent during the holiday season when consumers are shopping, exchanging gifts, and making charitable donations.

Scammers exploit the increased financial activity that occurs during the holiday season, when consumers can be distracted, to carry out a range of fraudulent schemes.

*SAFE MONEY is a series of informational sheets developed by the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC) to help consumers recognize and avoid common financial frauds and scams.*

### RED FLAGS

-  **Requests for upfront payment** via gift cards or wire transfers for services or fines.
-  **Tampered gift cards** have torn packaging or scratched-off security codes.
-  **Unsolicited offers** for discounted (or free) gift cards, travel, or luxury accommodations.
-  **Promotions and contests** asking for personal information or payment to claim a prize.
-  **Delivery-issue emails or texts** that aren't expected and request payment or sensitive information.
-  **Job listings** requiring upfront payments for training or supplies. Lack of clear employer or location information. Asking for sensitive data (Social Security numbers, banking details) before a formal hiring process.

## FRAUD METHODS

- ❗ **Delivery Scams:** Fake undelivered package notifications trick recipients into providing personal information or payment details.
- ❗ **Gift Card Fraud:** Victims tricked into paying for services or fines using gift cards, or scammers steal the balance from gift cards.
- ❗ **Holiday Shopping Scams:** Fake sales or promotions lure consumers into making purchases from fraudulent websites, but the customer never receives the items.
- ❗ **Phony Charities:** Fraudsters create fake charities to exploit people's goodwill and collect donations that are never used for the stated cause.
- ❗ **Seasonal Employment Scams:** Fake job listings where victims are asked to provide personal information, pay upfront fees, or work without compensation.
- ❗ **Travel Scams:** Fake travel deals, cheap flights, or holiday vacation packages have victims pay upfront, only to find tickets or bookings don't exist.

## AVOID FRAUD

### Purchase Gift Cards Directly

- Buy from trusted retailers online or in-store. Avoid third-party sellers. Inspect cards for signs of tampering.

### Never Pay a Third Party With Gift Cards

- No legitimate company will ask for payments using gift cards. If someone does, it's a scam.

### Beware of Unsolicited Offers

- Ignore unsolicited emails or social media messages offering free or discounted gift cards or travel.

### Book Through Reputable Agencies

- Or directly with airlines and hotels. Confirm bookings before making payments.

### Track Deliveries Directly

- Use the retailer or shipping service. Use secure delivery options if possible (e.g., package lockers or requiring a signature).

## REPORT FRAUD

Fraudsters exploit the holiday shopping season by using fake promotions or stealing gift card balances. You can take effective steps to report and potentially mitigate the impact of holiday and gift card scams.

### Report to the Federal Trade Commission

- Visit FTC's [ReportFraud.ftc.gov](https://www.ftc.gov/report-fraud) to report the fraud, providing as many details as possible. Or call 877-FTC-HELP (877-382-4357).

### Contact the Internet Crime Complaint Center

- Submit a complaint to the [IC3](https://www.ic3.gov), a division of the FBI.

### Contact Gift Card Issuer

- Contact customer service department of the gift card issuer to report the fraud. If reported quickly, some companies may be able to freeze the remaining gift card balance.
- Provide all relevant details including the card number, purchase information, and any correspondence with the scammer.

### Notify Financial Institutions

- Notify bank, credit card companies, or financial institutions to dispute unauthorized charges. Consider closing account and requesting new card(s).

### Alert Retailer or Online Marketplace

- If the scam occurred through an online retailer or marketplace, report it through their customer support or fraud reporting system.

### File a Police Report

- Contact or visit local police department to file a report with all the relevant information and documentation.



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## Promoting a Safe, Sound, and Fair Federal Banking System



The Office of the Comptroller of the Currency's (OCC) mission is to ensure that national banks and federal savings associations operate in a safe and sound manner, provide fair access to financial services, treat customers fairly, and comply with applicable laws and regulations.