ECU Police warn of scam targeting student families

GREENVILLE (Feb. 4, 2015)– East Carolina University Police are warning students and their families about a scam where a caller falsely informs family members that their ECU student is in trouble and needs money immediately.

Police said the caller will try to get the family member to provide the name of the ECU student and then will use that information to exploit the family's fear and get money.

“These scammers seem to be using the ECU name in the initial phone call and the families immediately want to help their grandchild or child and start filling in the blanks for the scammers,” Lt. Chris Sutton, ECU police, said.

Recently, ECU Police have worked with two families who were told by callers their student was in distress and needed money immediately. One call involved a report that the student had been hurt in a traffic accident.

The ECU Police Department-Investigations Unit officers are looking into these calls, according to Sutton. In one case, the parents called the police, and officers met face-to-face with the student, who had not been in a traffic accident and had been in class all day.

In the other case, a grandparent transferred money thinking it was to help his granddaughter. In fact, the money was sent to an account in the Dominican Republic. After working with police in the grandparent’s hometown, the family filed a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission.

Police officers encourage family members to try to remain calm and not volunteer information to the caller.

After disconnecting the call, family members can call the ECU Police to check on their student’s well-being. Also, Sutton encouraged anyone who receives a call like this to contact his or her local police department to make the agency aware.
“Both of the situations we’ve investigated are similar to scams elsewhere,” Sutton said. “And in both cases, the students were fine and knew nothing about the calls.”

Family members of ECU students may contact the ECU Police Department at 252-328-6787.

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