

Scammers using police phone numbers to target the vulnerable

Fraud detectives are warning residents to beware of criminals who are using police phone numbers to target vulnerable people.

Those responsible are not actually calling from a Kent Police station but are changing their caller ID to make it appear like they are – a process known as 'spoofing'.

Since the beginning of July the force has received at least three reports of this nature from people living in Faversham, Gravesend and Gillingham.

On each occasion the victim was contacted by someone claiming to be from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, who told them they were wanted for tax evasion and would shortly be contacted by a police officer. They were then asked what their local police station was, giving the fraudster the opportunity to research the phone number for that station and arranging for an accomplice to pretend to call back on it.

Two of those targeted were so worried about being arrested that they agreed to pay the bogus police officer around £900 each to settle the amount they were told they owed.

Detective Sergeant Alec Wood of the Kent and Essex Serious Crime Directorate said: 'Criminals are always looking for new ways in which to win the trust of those they target, and calling from a number that appears to be a police number is the latest trick up their sleeve.'

'It is important to remember that a police officer will never ask you to pay money over the phone, nor will they threaten you with arrest for not paying.'

'Never give out your personal information in response to an incoming call, or rely upon the caller ID as the sole means of identification – particularly if the caller is asking you to do something that will affect you financially.'

'If somebody rings you asking for this information, do not give it to them. Instead, hang up the phone and call a trusted number from a different phone or wait at least five minutes to ensure the line has cleared and you are not still talking to the same fraudster or an accomplice.'

'Contact your bank immediately if you think you may have been scammed and also report the incident to Action Fraud.'

'Remember the ABC rule to help protect yourself and others against fraud – never Assume someone is telling the truth, never Believe what they say unless you are confident they are who they say they are, and always Confirm the details they have provided.'