

FDA Warns of Extortion Scam Involving Online Pharmacies

Pharmacy

Extortionists posing as FDA agents are targeting customers of online and over-the-phone pharmacies and demanding some individuals pay cash fines or face law enforcement action, according to an [FDA statement](#), [CBS News](#) reports (Rand, CBS News, 1/7).

Details of Illegal Activity

Under the international scheme, criminals posing as FDA or other law enforcement agents tell consumers that purchasing drugs over the telephone or Internet is illegal, CNN's "[The Chart](#)" reports. They then are threatened with police action unless fines ranging between \$100 and \$250,000 are paid by wire transfer to a specific location, usually in the Dominican Republic, according to FDA. The scammers also threaten

property searches, arrest, physical harm, incarceration and deportation if individuals refuse to send money.

FDA said the extortionists have used customers' previous online purchases to cull personal information, including:

- Addresses;
- Birth dates;
- Credit card information;
- Names;
- Phone numbers; and
- Social security numbers (Young, "The Chart," CNN, 1/7).

Dana Corrigan -- FDA's associate commissioner for regulatory affairs -- said that impersonating an FDA official violates federal law and that FDA agents and other law enforcement officials do not have authorization to set or collect criminal fines (CBS News, 1/7).

Combating Online Extortion Schemes

FDA and other federal agencies are pursuing several criminal investigations on national and international levels to look into the issue.

The agency also is reminding consumers that purchasing pharmaceutical products online or by telephone from an unknown origin "can pose a substantial health risk" ("The Chart," CNN, 1/7). Read more: <http://www.ihealthbeat.org/articles/2011/1/10/fda-warns-of-extortion-scam-involving-online-pharmacies.aspx#ixzz1AfgM7vQr>