



# PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE

## COMMUNITY AWARENESS BULLETIN

CAB 001-19

January 2, 2019

### WHITE VAN SCAM

The Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) is reminding residents of the resurgence of the “white van scam,” a scam involving the sale of electronic home theater goods from the back of an SUV or van. The con typically involves individuals selling “expensive high-end” home theater equipment (speakers, projectors, etc.) out of their vehicle at a significantly discounted price. The equipment is typically cheap, because, generally, it is poor-quality imitations of name-brand goods.

#### How the Scam Works

White van scammers often target moderately trafficked areas such as shopping centers, gas stations, and bank parking lots. They typically approach individuals using a fictitious backstory indicating they are selling expensive high-end equipment because they have too much inventory or have extra units from a recent job that they need to get rid of quickly. In an attempt to mislead the buyer, the equipment’s brand name is often similar to well-known manufacturers.<sup>1</sup> The merchandise is normally in original packaging, with professional looking imagery and marketing materials including an MSRP price tag and buzzwords such as “4K,” “High-Resolution Audio,” and high wattage numbers.<sup>2</sup>

The scammer may apply urgency or pressure to the potential buyer indicating this is a now or never opportunity. The scammer also may be very accommodating; for example, they might be willing to wait while the potential buyer rushes to the ATM to get cash. In some instances, the scammer may be willing to accept whatever monetary amount the buyer can offer at the time.

The white van scam has also infiltrated the internet with scammers presenting online store-fronts, “official” Facebook pages, Craigslist ads, and eBay accounts to advertise and peddle their goods. Be aware that the online store-fronts are meant to help legitimize the shoddy products and high MSRP prices when customers look them up online. For example, a storefront or eBay listing may display a “high-end” MSRP price of \$2,500 for one item but another listing will drastically mark it down to around \$300.<sup>3</sup>

#### Recommendations to Avoid the White Van Scam

Below are recommendations to help avoid falling victim to the white van scam:

- Remain hypervigilant if approached by an individual(s) selling merchandise out of their vehicle
- Google or internet search the company name or description of the situation, and add the word “scam” at the end before searching, which may help identify potential scams
- Be aware that brand names may sound similar to well-known and regarded manufacturers
- Ask the seller very specific questions about the product, origin, brand
- Do not feel pressured to succumb to the seller’s urgency to purchase immediately
- Closely inspect the merchandise before buying
- If it seems too good to be true, it probably is
- When shopping online, use a credit card rather than a debit card; credit cards give you much greater consumer protection if your information is stolen



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### If You Have Been the Victim of a Scam:

- Contact your local law enforcement agency
- File a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission at <https://reportfraud.ftc.gov> or 1-877-FTC-HELP. If possible, be prepared to provide:
  - Your contact information: name, address, phone number, email address
  - The type of product or service involved
  - Information about the seller and circumstances of the transaction
    - Amount paid, method of payment, date of transaction
    - If in-person: location, gender, physical description, name or logo on vehicle
    - If online: website

If you see something suspicious call 9-1-1-immediately and report the information to authorities with as much detail as possible.

<sup>1</sup> Waniata, Ryan. (2018, August 17). The white van speaker scam explained, and how it moved to Craigslist and Facebook. *Digital Trends*. Retrieved 12/20/2018 from <https://www.digitaltrends.com/home-theater/dont-be-a-sucker-the-white-van-speaker-scam-explained/>.

<sup>2</sup> Navarro, Francis. (2018, August 9). Beware! A new twist in the old 'White Van Speaker Scam'. *Komando.com*. Retrieved 12/20/2018 from <https://www.komando.com/happening-now/480834/beware-a-new-twist-in-the-old-white-van-speaker-scam>.

<sup>3</sup> Navarro, Francis (2018, August 9). Beware! A new twist in the old 'White Van Speaker Scam'. *Komando.com*. Retrieved 12/20/2018 from <https://www.komando.com/happening-now/480834/beware-a-new-twist-in-the-old-white-van-speaker-scam>.