



Nigerian Letter or "419" Fraud

Nigerian letter frauds are part impersonation fraud and part advance fee schemes. A letter is mailed from Nigeria, offering the recipient the "opportunity" to share in a percentage of millions of dollars. In the letter, a self-proclaimed government official is trying to transfer currency illegally out of Nigeria. The recipient of the letter is encouraged to send information to the government official, such as blank letterhead stationery, bank name and account numbers, and other identifying information to a fax number provided in the letter. Some of these requests have also been received through E-mails. The scheme relies on convincing the victim to send money in several installments to the fake Nigeria government official.

Payment of taxes, bribes to government officials, and legal fees are often described in great detail with the promise that all expenses will be reimbursed as soon as the funds are transferred out of Nigeria. In actuality, the millions of dollars do not exist, and the victim eventually ends up losing everything. Once the victim stops sending money, the perpetrators have been known to use the personal information and checks that they received to impersonate the victim, draining bank accounts and credit card balances until the victim's assets have been diminished. While such an invitation impresses most law-abiding citizens as a laughable hoax, millions of dollars in losses are caused by these schemes annually. In addition to losing large sums of money, some victims have been lured to Nigeria, where they have been imprisoned by the Nigeria Government. The Nigerian government is not sympathetic to victims of these schemes, since the victims actually conspire to remove currency from Nigeria in a manner that is contrary to Nigerian law. The schemes themselves violate section 419 of the Nigerian criminal code, hence the label "419 frauds."

Direct any inquiries relative to this correspondence to the Senior Services Section, at City-Net 5-5141 or Pax 0260.