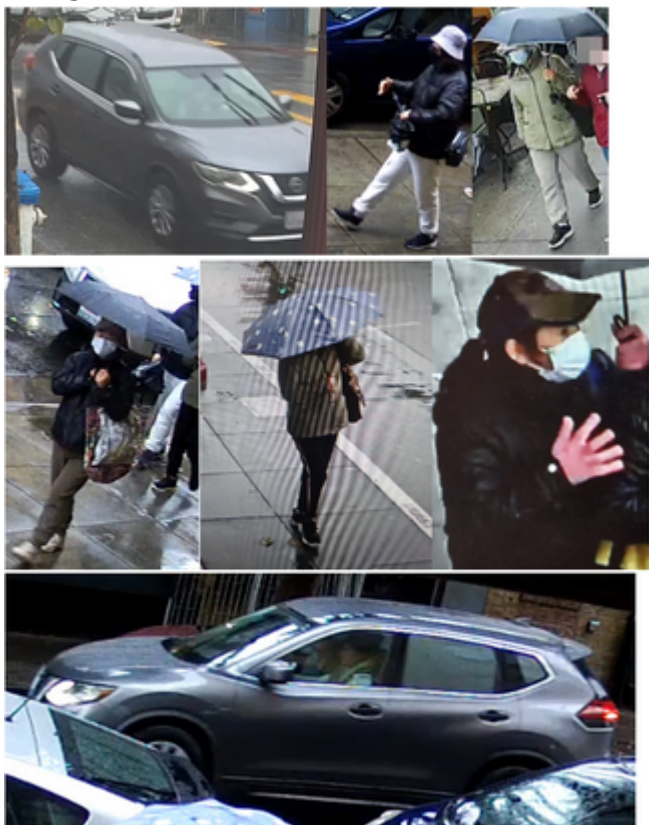


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San Francisco Police Department Warns Chinese Community After Recent Blessing Scams 25-004

Image



January 14, 2025 | 10:43 PM

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The San Francisco Police Department is urging members of the Chinese community to be on alert for blessing scams following several recent cases in which criminals stole approximately \$374,000 in cash and property from victims, San Francisco police Chief Bill Scott announced Tuesday.

The cases, which began in late November and have continued into January, involve Chinese-speaking perpetrators preying on the kindness and beliefs of vulnerable community members. The suspects often claim to provide relief from a curse or illness of family members through “purification ceremonies” in which they instruct victims to place cash and valuables into a bag to be “blessed.” The scammers tell the victims to open the bag at a later date in order for the “blessing” to take effect.

When the victims finally open their bags, and discover their valuables were switched, the suspects are long gone. Similar cases have occurred for years in San Francisco with criminals often coming to the city around the holidays and Lunar New Year to take advantage of victims.

“These crimes against our most vulnerable community members are unacceptable, and we are working diligently to identify the suspects and bring them to justice,” said SFPD Chief Bill Scott. “As we continue investigating these crimes, we want our community members to stay vigilant to prevent blessing scams by continuing to talk to one another daily and working with SFPD to report these crimes.”

“Every year, members of our community are targeted by bad actors preying on vulnerable populations, costing hundreds of thousands of dollars. These scams are against the law, and we will arrest people committing crimes against our neighbors,” said Mayor Daniel Lurie. “I am urging everyone: Look out for red flags, report suspicious activity, and stay safe.”

“Blessing scams are not new and are becoming increasingly brazen,” said District Attorney Brooke Jenkins. “These despicable scams rob innocent victims of their hard-earned money and also take their dignity as well, as victims often feel deep shame. My office will continue to work with the San Francisco Police Department and law enforcement to educate the public in order to prevent these cases from happening and will not hesitate to prosecute cases.”

The recent series involves at least seven cases. They include:

- Nov. 23, when criminals stole \$90,000 in cash and property from a 69-year-old woman in the Bayview District.
- Nov. 24, when criminals stole \$40,000 in cash and property from a 75-year-old woman in the Taraval District.
- Dec. 12, when criminals stole \$70,000 in cash and property from a 79-year-old woman in the Bayview District.
- Dec. 14, when criminals stole \$14,000 in cash and property from a 72-year-old woman in the Central District.
- Dec. 16, when criminals stole \$91,000 in cash and property from a 69-year-old woman in the Central District.
- Dec. 17, when criminal stole \$7,000 in cash and property from a 69-year-old female in the Ingleside District
- Jan. 2, when criminals stole \$62,000 in cash and property from a 77-year-old female in the Richmond District.
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Photographs of suspects and a vehicle are attached to this news release. Anyone with information is asked to contact the SFPD at 415-575-4444 or text a tip to TIP411 and begin the message with SFPD.

The SFPD is working closely with the victims, law enforcement partners, and community groups to hold perpetrators accountable and to prevent these crimes from occurring.

The SFPD has held recent meetings with the community and law enforcement partners to develop new strategies to prevent blessing scams. SFPD is urging friends and family members to discuss daily activities and encounters with one another to raise awareness, identify red flags, and report all suspicious activities.

The SFPD and the San Francisco District Attorney's Office (SFDA) are working closely with community stakeholders who have provided valuable input in how to protect one another from falling victim to this type of scam:

- SFPD Community Engagement Division's (CED) bilingual officers hold personal safety and scam awareness workshops with the community in the city to inform, educate, and support community members all year round.
- SFPD is working in partnership with the community to promote an ongoing safety campaign focusing on distribution of tote bags printed with safety

information and SFPD safety tips.

- SFPD is working to update a current education video based on feedback from officers who have had experience working with crime victims and SFPD CED officers to strengthen community policing needs.
- SFPD CED officers proactively make connections with private and community entities to offer broader partnerships for further audience reach such as company office workers.
- SFPD CED works with scam victims on connecting with resources offered by SFDA and community-based organizations.
- SFPD CED officers and SFDA Victim Services Division staff work in collaboration to provide presentations to community members at community-based organizations and senior centers throughout the city.

Blessing Scam Safety Tips

- Be aware of strangers
- Do not easily believe what strangers say
- Keep a distance from strangers
- Do not follow strangers anywhere
- Do not let strangers touch you
- Do not withdraw money at banks with strangers
- Do not bring strangers home
- Be aware if strangers ask for money
- Before withdrawing large sums of money/ valuables, tell your family

Ways To Report Blessing Scam Incidents, Other Resources and Language Access

SFPD is committed to safety with respect for all our City's communities. The department works closely with San Francisco's multilingual communities to identify and address specific safety concerns. SFPD currently has hundreds of officers that speak more than 30 different languages. The department is encouraging all bilingual officers to become certified to provide Limited English Proficiency (LEP) services to community members.

Anyone who is confronted by scammers or anyone who knows of an elder who was approached by scammers is strongly advised to contact police. When calling or working with SFPD, residents may use simple English to state to their preferred language of service, such as "Cantonese," "Mandarin" or "Toisanese."

- Call 9-1-1 for crimes in progress
- Reports can be made at any SFPD District Station
- Call Dispatch at (415) 553-0123 and requesting an officer to take a report.
- Cantonese speakers can leave tips on a special tip line by calling (415) 553-9212 or 1-855-737-3847
- Information can also be called into the Anonymous Tip Line at (415) 575-4444 or via Text a Tip by texting a message to TIP411 and beginning the message with SFPD.
- To request a SFDA presentation please contact the Victim Services Division via email at: victimservices@sfgov.org or via phone at (628) 652-4100.

SFPD Case #'s 240734996, 240731588, 240769040, 240789402, 240775508, 240780353, 250004030

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