FS-ISAC | Security Tips Newsletter

May 2025 | Issue No. 21

Be cyber smart to stay cyber safe.

Is This Text Real or a Trap?

Summary

If you and your children have a mobile phone, you've probably received texts from friends and family. If you've opted in to receive texts from retailers, you get these too. But what do you do when you receive a text, and you question the source?

The answer matters because your response to a questionable text might keep you safe from a scammer — or lead you into a trap.

How Text Scams Work

Below is a simplistic example of how a spoofed message can be sent to you.

Text Message Scams on the Rise

New data from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) shows that in 2024, "consumers reported losing $470 million to scams that started with text messages. This amount is five times higher than what was reported in 2020, even though the number of reports declined."

Step One. Threat actors obtain your phone number on the Dark Web or generate your number with an auto-dialer tool.

Step Two. The scammer creates a message. Many scam texts sound urgent to get victims to react without thinking — "invoice overdue" or "your account has been breached" are common ruses.

Step Three. The scammer sends the text and hopes you bite.

Prevention Tips

- **Don't reply to unexpected text messages**. The text may push you to react quickly, but it's best to stop and think it through.

- **Never click links in unexpected messages**. You might download malicious software (malware) that will compromise your device, and scammers often create real-looking websites to draw you deeper into the trap.

- **Don't assume a text from a known company or organization is legit.** Double check by contacting the company. Don't use information from the text — get a phone number or email address from the company's website.

Filtering Unwanted Texts

There are many ways to filter unwanted text messages or stop them before they reach you.

On your phone	Your phone may have an option to filter and block spam or messages from unknown senders. Here's how to filter and block messages on an iPhone and how to block a phone number on an Android phone.
Through your wireless provider	Your wireless provider might have a tool or service that lets you block calls and text messages. Check out ctia.org, a website from the wireless industry, to learn about options from different providers.
With a call-blocking app	Go to ctia.org for a list of call-blocking apps for Android, BlackBerry, Apple, and Windows phones, or search for an app online. Check out the features, user ratings, and expert reviews.

Take Action – Report Texts

- Forward spam messages to 7726 (SPAM). This helps your wireless provider spot and block similar messages.
- Report potential scams on either the Apple iMessages app or Google Messages app for Android users.
- Report potential scams to the FTC at ReportFraud.ftc.gov.

If you've lost money to a scam, reach out to the company that transferred the money right away to see if there's a way to get your money back. Then report the scammer at ReportFraud.ftc.gov.

If You're a Victim?

Immediately change any passwords you might have revealed. Consider reporting the attack to IC3.gov and the police and file a report with the Federal Trade Commission.

Getting Help

If you identify suspicious activity involving your financial institution, contact them immediately.