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Don’t Get Scammed

Fort Worth, TX – As holiday shopping ramps up, watch out for gift card scams.

A common scheme occurs when thieves steal or tamper with the magnetic strip or barcode on gift cards while they are still on the shelf. Once an unsuspecting shopper buys and activates the card, scammers drain the funds before the recipient has a chance to use it.

“Criminals know gift cards are popular during the holiday season, and they are taking advantage of that,” District Attorney Phil Sorrells said. “Stay alert. A few seconds of caution can keep you from losing your hard-earned money.”

Here’s how to protect yourself.

Buy from reputable retailers and choose cards kept behind the counter or in locked displays.

Inspect the packaging for signs of tampering before purchasing.

Verify the card information – make sure the serial number on the card matches the one printed on the packaging or receipt.

Ask the cashier to scan and verify activation at the time of purchase.

Register the card online if possible.

Use the card soon after purchase and check its balance often.

Never share the card number or pin.

Keep your receipts and report any problems to the store where you bought the gift cards.

Scammers caught tampering with gift cards in Texas could face charges of fraudulent use, possession, or tampering under a new law that went into effect September 1, 2025.

Depending on the number of gift cards involved, sentences range from a state jail felony to a first-degree felony, which could land some scammers in prison for the rest of their lives.

“Scammers are counting on shoppers to be distracted,” Sorrells said. “Stay aware and make sure your gifts – and your money – end up where they’re supposed to go.”

If you suspect fraud, report it to the Federal Trade Commission at ReportFraud.ftc.gov.