

NEW TWIST ON COUNTERFEIT CHECK SCHEMES

TARGETING U.S. LAW FIRMS

The FBI continues to receive reports of counterfeit check schemes targeting U.S. law firms. Scammers send e-mails to lawyers, claiming to be overseas and seeking legal representation to collect delinquent payments from third parties in the U.S. The law firm receives a retainer agreement, invoices reflecting the amount owed, and a check payable to the law firm. The firm is instructed to extract the retainer fee, including any other fees associated with the transaction, and wire the remaining funds to banks in Korea, China, Ireland, or Canada. By the time the check is determined to be counterfeit, the funds have already been wired overseas.

In a new twist, the fraudulent client seeking legal representation is an ex-wife "on assignment" in an Asian country, and she claims to be pursuing a collection of divorce settlement monies from her ex-husband in the U.S. The law firm agrees to represent the ex-wife, sends an e-mail to the ex-husband, and receives a "certified" check for the settlement via delivery service. The ex-wife instructs the firm to wire the funds, less the retainer fee, to an overseas bank account. When the scam is executed successfully, the law firm wires the money before discovering the check is counterfeit.

All Internet users need to be cautious when they receive unsolicited e-mails. Law firms are advised to conduct as much due diligence as possible before engaging in transactions with parties who are handling their business solely via e-mail, particularly those parties claiming to reside overseas.