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Smishing text scam escalates in Oklahoma; be wary!

Consumers urged to not click links from unknown sources or give out personal information

The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority is advising consumers to be wary of the pervasive smishing text scam plaguing Oklahomans this week.

Scam text messages have been targeting tolling authorities nationwide for the past year. Oklahomans are seeing a significant increase in these texts after bad actors in other countries have mimicked OTA's pikepass.com website and messaging.

"We want to be clear that the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority is in no way affiliated with these fake text messages or emails claiming that people owe unpaid tolls," said Executive Director Joe Echelle. "OTA is actively combatting these false websites by reporting them to the authorities and working with domain registrars to have them taken down as quickly as possible. The reality is that this scam will remain active as long as unsuspecting consumers are making unnecessary payments to these thieves. We are asking the public to please only pay tolls through approved and secure methods."

As of noon Wednesday, OTA's IT security personnel working in conjunction with other tolling authorities nationally had identified 264 scam websites and 146 websites had been deactivated in the past week, Echelle said.

"The problem is that we're seeing multiple fake websites go up at a time including 100 new websites in the past 24 hours alone to continue this egregious targeting of consumers," he said. "We want to reassure turnpike customers that their personal information remains secure with OTA as these false text messages are not related to actual turnpike travel."

Some of the smishing texts claim consequences that are not possible. The OTA cannot impound vehicles or garnish wages, as examples.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

There are some easy ways to identify these texts and emails as fraudulent:

- Coming from an email or an international number.
- The message is unexpected.

- Spelling errors, poor grammar, or odd sentence structure.
- Extreme urgency.
- Links that are not verifiable or not from trusted sources.
- Includes unexpected attachments.
- Requires an opt-in in order to complete the action required.

OTA has partnered with the Federal Trade Commission, which has provided an Oklahoma specific reporting link. Those who receive a fraudulent text are encouraged to report it to the FTC at <https://reportfraud.ftc.gov/#/?orgcode=OKTPKE> and/or to the FBI's IC3 at www.ic3.gov.

The public is encouraged to report and delete the text message, or they also may forward it to the FTC's text line at 7726.

Those with questions or concerns about their PIKEPASS account may check their accounts online at www.pikepass.com. PlatePay customers may look up any tolls owed by entering in their license plate number at www.platepay.com.

For more information about how to identify scam text and email messages, go to <https://pikepass.com/updates>

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