

## AN ECHO PRESS EDITORIAL

# Beware of the 12 scams of Christmas

**A** Christmas Grinch – 12 of them actually – are lurking out there, waiting to wreck your holiday. But you can stay one step ahead of them by using some commonsense and heeding the advice of the Better Business Bureau.

The bureau recently sent out an advisory urging consumers to watch out for any fraudulent schemes aimed at swiping their cash and stealing personal information.

The bureau came up with a “Naughty List” of the top 12 scams of Christmas that are most likely to catch consumers and donors off guard during this season:

1. Misleading social media ads. As you scroll through your social media feed, you often see items for sale from a small business. Sometimes the business even claims to support a charity to try to get you to order, or they offer a free trial. Do your homework and research the company before ordering. Check out the business profile on BBB.org and read the reviews.

2. Social media gift exchanges. A newer version of this scam revolves around exchanging bottles of wine; another suggests purchasing \$10 gifts online. Another twist asks you to submit your email into a list where participants get to pick a name and send money to strangers to “pay it forward.” In all of these versions, participants unwittingly share their personal information, along with those of their family members and friends, and are further tricked into buying and shipping gifts or money to unknown individuals. And – it’s an illegal pyramid scheme.

3. Holiday apps. Be wary of free apps, as they can sometimes contain more advertising than apps that require a nominal fee. Free apps can also contain malware.

4. Alerts about compromised accounts. The bureau has been receiving reports on its Scam Tracker about a con claiming your Amazon, Paypal, Netflix or bank account has been compromised. Victims receive an email, call, or text message which explains that there has been suspicious activity on one of their accounts, and it further urges them to take immediate action.

5. Free gift cards. Scammers take advantage of this

weakness by sending bulk phishing emails requesting personal information to receive gift cards. They also use pop-up ads or send text messages with links saying you were randomly selected as the winner for a prize.

6. Temporary holiday jobs. Shippers and delivery services are top holiday employers this year because of the increase in online orders and the need to get most of these packages delivered before Christmas. Jobseekers need to be wary of employment scams.

7. Look-alike websites. Be wary of emails with links enclosed. Some may lead to look-alike websites created by scammers to trick people into downloading malware, making dead-end purchases and sharing private information.

8. Fake charities. Donors are advised to lookout for fraudulent charities and scammers pretending to be individuals in need. Avoid impromptu donation decisions to unfamiliar organizations. Responsible organizations will welcome a gift tomorrow as much as they do today.

9. Fake shipping notifications: Scammers are using the new surge of shopping online due to the pandemic to send phishing emails with links enclosed that may allow unwanted access to your private information or download malware onto your device. They also try to trick people into paying new shipping fees.

10. Pop up holiday virtual events. Scammers are creating fake event pages, social media posts, and emails, charging admission for what used to be a free event. Confirm with the organizer of the event if there is an admission fee. In the cases where there is a charge, use a credit card.

11. Top holiday wish list items. This year, the Galactic Snackin’ Grogu Animatronic (aka Baby Yoda) and game consoles are items in high demand. Be very cautious when considering to purchase these items from individuals through social sites.

12. Puppy scams. Many families, especially those with children, may be considering to add a furry friend to their household this year. However, you could fall victim to a pet scam, which is on the rise this year. Request to see the pet in person before making a purchase.

# My miserable bout with COVID

**I**t started Sunday afternoon, Nov. 14. I didn’t feel quite right. Sluggish. Tired. Body aches.

I tried to brush it off as a lazy Sunday. But it only got worse. I felt just plain lousy. My wife, Celeste, took my temperature and it was just over 101. The next morning I tested positive for COVID. And so began a hellish 13-day ordeal unlike anything I’ve ever experienced before.

I know some people who are diagnosed with COVID barely notice it. Some compare it to a mild flu. And, of course, some have died from it. I was somewhere in the middle.

Some of what I went through is a blur of going from the couch, to a bed, to another bed, trying, without success, to sleep. Thankfully, I wasn’t having trouble breathing and I was so grateful for the two doses of vaccine I’d completed months ago.

But I still ended up in the emergency room. It was on Day 6 with COVID. The lack of sleep finally caught up with me. Even though I’d been gulping down ibuprofen, my temperature was still hovering around 101. It was about 11 p.m. when I reached a breaking point. The thought of lying there in the bed through the whole night, feeling like I did, was unbearable. Looking back on it, I think I fell into a mild depression. I just wanted to get back to normal.

My mind began to lose focus. I would say something without fully realizing what I said. Then I’d replay it in my mind to see if it made sense. At one point, I started mumbling letters from a game of Words with Friends over and over like some kind of mantra – which scared the heck out of Celeste. She told me she was going to take me to the ER. I didn’t even protest.

When we arrived at Alomere’s ER, Celeste had to wait in the car while a nurse and doctor tried to figure out how they could help me. They checked my breathing right away and I was still fine on that front. But the headache, fever, body aches, fatigue and nausea were taking a



Celeste Edenloff / Echo Press

This is only a sample of the medications that Celeste and I used during our battle with COVID.

toll. Worst of all, my brain felt like it was moving through mush. I couldn’t remember certain words. When I told the doctor about how Celeste had tested positive for COVID four days after me, I couldn’t remember the breathing problem she had, only that it started with an “a.”

“Asthma?” the doctor guessed.

“That’s it. I’m sorry but my mind isn’t working right,” I said, worrying that he’d order a CT scan.

The doctor, however, wasn’t the least surprised. “COVID brain fog,” he said. “We’ve seen a lot of that.”

All my other symptoms were very typical for COVID patients. The doctor advised me of medications to take, gave me benadryl to help me sleep and provided me with a fingertip oximeter to measure my blood oxygen levels. The visit seemed to help. I was finally able to get some rest.

The next few days were another blur of bad movies, uneasy sleep, no appetite and more pills. I was so sick of taking all those pills I gagged when I tried to swallow them.

On Day 10, Celeste drove me to Fergus Falls for monoclonal antibodies to help fight the virus. I took four shots – one in each arm and two in the

stomach. Let’s just say it wasn’t one of my manliest moments.

Thanksgiving seemed to turn the tide. Even though I’d been warned about side effects from the antibodies, I was spared that misery. My fever finally eased. I was even able to eat some turkey. But I was still lethargic with no ambition or energy.

Finally, on Day 13, all my symptoms faded. Celeste and I were both rundown but we were able to have a somewhat normal date night.

Celeste and I would like to personally thank all those who helped us get through COVID – friends, family, coworkers, the doctor, ER staff and nurses. There are amazing people out there on the front lines who we should never take for granted.

Stop reading right here if you don’t like taking good advice. But please, for the love of God, take this virus seriously. Don’t let anyone tell you it’s fake or “just a flu.” Get vaccinated, get a booster shot if you can and if you’re sick, stay home. Don’t increase the chances of someone else going through what I did.

“It’s Our Turn” is a weekly column that rotates among members of the Echo Press editorial staff.

## LETTERS

### Letter to the editor had good start, bad finish

**To the editor:**  
That letter to the editor in the Nov. 24 Echo Press about things to be thankful for was a very good letter at first and then it became political. If we could get both parties to work together, we could be very thankful for that.

Gordon Doose  
Alexandria, MN

### What are you doing about plastic waste?

**To the editor:**  
287 pounds. That’s how much plastic waste the average American disposes annually according to this report by the nongovernmental National Academy of Science. 240,000,000

metric tons in all. Why so much plastic? Plastic is cheap because its price does not include the costs paid by living beings.

Now, you can sit back and reassure yourself that it isn’t you that’s doing this. How much could those filmy plastic grocery store bags matter? Those containers of ketchup, juice, cheese, hamburger and birdseed really add up.

There’s only so much an individual can do. We’ve quit buying almost everything that comes in plastic, but are hanging on dearly to our Hellman’s Mayonnaise while we study recipes to make our own. You have to see how much mayo we consume annually to understand the depth of this sacrifice. BLT’s without Hellman’s? Unthinkable. But this is

the year we’ll do it.

U.S. Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse hopes to awaken our conscience with legislation, but it will be resisted and denounced by the usual suspects (You have to answer to the shareholders) and will inevitably be watered down.

Still, I think it’s important for those of us living down here at sea level to take a stand. Encouraged by city and county officials, churches and environment advocates could provide leadership. Groceries and retailers could try alternative packaging. You could send an encouraging email to co-sponsor Republican Sen. Dan Sullivan. Or ask our Congresswoman Michelle Fischbach to sponsor the bill in the House.

To do nothing is to

cooperate while massive harm is done to ocean life and human health. Few of us would watch while a helpless person is abused. To stand idly by while a kind of murder is done isn’t illegal, but it grants permission to those who ought to listen to their better angels.

Jeanne Johnson  
Alexandria, MN

### ‘Dog whistle’ racism and what to do about it

**To the editor:**  
The meaning of “dog whistle” is obvious: it is a whistle for dogs. Dogs can hear higher frequencies than humans. So, a dog whistle is nothing more than a high-pitched whistle that canines can hear, but humans cannot. In politics, a dog whis-

tle is a coded message communicated through words easily understood by one group of people, but not by others.

During the 1960s civil rights movement, the phrase, “protecting our way of life” was a commonly used racist dog whistle meant to convince white people that civil rights legislation would be bad for them. What is “our way of life?” To many white people during the 1960s, it often was segregation and ensuring limited voting rights for people of color.

Some politicians routinely tell constituents that he or she is protecting “our way of life.” The message is purposeful. It is a racist dog whistle to convince voters that the politician is protecting white people from black advance-

ment. The politician can deny it, but it is clear to fellow racists.

If you support politicians who use the phrase, “protecting our way of life,” look in the mirror and be honest about what you see. You have two choices: First, silence in the face of dog whistle racism is complicity with racism. You have no option other than to admit that you are racist. Second, you can confront dog whistle racism by naming it for what it is. You are either a racist person, or an anti-racist person. There exists no in-between. Neutrality in the face of racism does not exist. Silence is racism.

Jon Koll  
Alexandria, MN