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COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

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***** PRESS RELEASE *****

Scam Alert: District Attorney Warns of Blackmail Scam

Santa Barbara County District Attorney Joyce E. Dudley is warning residents about the latest on-line extortion scam that can target a variety of individuals. The District Attorney's Office has received numerous reports of this scam in recent weeks.

The scam usually begins with a scammer sending an anonymous email or letter claiming to have uncovered a highly embarrassing secret. In one version, the scammer has discovered one of your passwords, and alleges that you used this password to log onto pornographic websites. The scammer will claim that they used your password to access information stored in your computer including your emails and contact lists. The scammer will tell you they made a "split view videotape"; one screen showing the porno site that you allegedly accessed and the other showing your computer web camera recording your responses while you watch the site. In another version of this scam, the fraudster will claim that they have uncovered evidence that you have engaged in acts of adultery.

The scammer threatens to reveal the information to the recipient's spouse or significant other, family, friends and employer and demands payment in exchange for secrecy. In an effort to avoid detection, the scammer often insists on being paid in bitcoin.

These are scams. The fraudster does not really have any incriminating or embarrassing information about you. If you get one of these emails, delete the message and do not attempt to respond. If the scammer does have one of your passwords, immediately change your accounts. Contact your financial institutions and law enforcement. File a report with the FBI at www.ic3.gov. This site helps law enforcement understand and track scams as well as better inform the public.

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