



Customer Advisory: Don't Become an Unwitting Money Launderer

Criminal organizations are targeting students and people looking for easy stay-at-home income. The online offers say all you have to do is set up bank accounts, send or receive money, convert dollars to crypto-assets or vice-versa, or receive funds to buy merchandise and deliver the goods to a third-party. For your time and trouble, you get to keep some of the money you receive.

In reality, transnational criminal organizations use the recruits' unsuspecting accounts to make it harder for law enforcement to trace the funds the criminals have stolen through fraud or other serious crimes such as human trafficking or illegal drug sales. The criminals call them “**money mules**” — people who, at someone else's direction, receive and move assets. Law enforcement calls it money laundering, and it could land you in jail if it continues unreported. Your identity could also be reused by the criminals.

Besides job seekers who may believe offers to be “secret shoppers” or “payment processors” are legitimate, other people may think they are helping a friend through an urgent or difficult situation, but may actually be victims of a [romance or friendship confidence scam](#). Relationship confidence scams, which the criminals call “pig butchering” frauds, fuel much of these vast and sophisticated money laundering networks.

What to look for

Off-ramping. One of the easiest ways for criminals to move money is via crypto-assets on a blockchain, such as Tether (USDT) on the Tron blockchain, or bitcoin. Meanwhile, law enforcement is getting better at tracing and seizing stolen assets. So, the criminals need to convert their tokens to dollars or “off-ramp” money from the blockchain. The criminals might send coins to a digital wallet and instruct you to move the money to your digital-asset trading account, convert the crypto to dollars, and move the cash from your bank to another account.

On-ramping. Criminals could also want you to move dollars to the blockchain by accepting cash, using it to buy crypto-assets—sometimes at a bitcoin kiosk—and forward the crypto to another wallet.

Smurfing. In this situation, you might receive a large amount of crypto to your digital wallet or trading account and you are asked to send several smaller amounts to a list of wallet addresses.

Remember

- Moving money for illegal activities can lead to criminal and civil charges.
- If you are approached online and asked to move money, immediately end communications.
- If you have already received money or crypto assets from a person you met online, do not send it to anyone else. Notify your financial institution and consider changing accounts and wallet addresses, especially if you have provided any personally sensitive information about yourself, bank, or crypto-asset trading accounts.
- Immediately notify the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) at [ic3.gov](https://www.ic3.gov), and contact your [local FBI field office](#). You can also submit a tip or complaint at [CFTC.gov/complaint](https://www.cftc.gov/complaint).

Protecting the Public

The CFTC has participated in an international money mule initiative since 2023 and takes steps to identify and disrupt money mule activity related to fraud schemes that target market customers. [Learn more about money mule scams](#) and potential consequences.

This article was prepared by the Commodity Futures Trading Commission's Office of Customer Education and Outreach. It is provided for general informational purposes only and does not provide legal or investment advice to any individual or entity. Please consult with your own legal advisor before taking any action based on this information. This advisory references non-CFTC websites, and organizations. The CFTC cannot attest to the accuracy of information in those non-CFTC references.