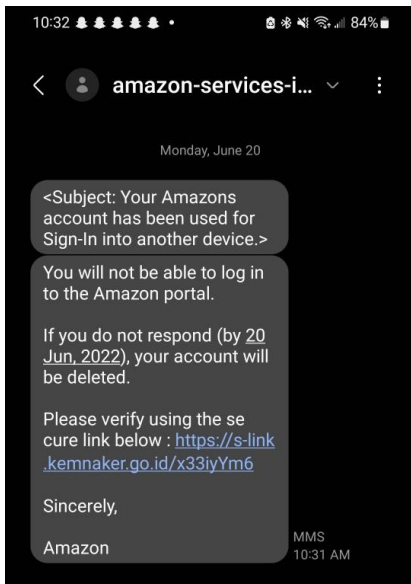




## Better Business Bureau® Senior Awareness Initiative Amazon Prime Day is also a prime day for scams

Better Business Bureau® Accredited Business, Amazon, recently confirmed their yearly “Prime Day” sale will take place on July 12th through the 13th. With so many consumers looking to find a good bargain, scammers are also searching for easy victims. BBB receives reports about Amazon imposter scams and online shopping fraud throughout the year. However, BBB is warning consumers to be particularly careful about these scams in the upcoming days.

Recently, a consumer living in Garfield Heights reported to BBB about her experience receiving a scam message. The consumer said “I received a text message from Amazon today. It stated all in caps that “your card was used to make a transaction for \$645.68.” It did not say for what item.” The consumer called the number and was told the order was for an iPhone 11. She was then directed by the scammer to their “Security Department” where they wanted her to put an app on her phone to create a fake Chime account. The consumer got suspicious and hung up. She contacted Amazon was told they do not send text messages and Amazon also assured the consumer that there was no transaction on her account but also suggested she change her password.



Amazon imposters typically use scare tactics to elicit a response from victims like the image on the left. Scammers may send messages regarding a high-value item, such as a new iPhone, tablet, or computer purchase. Messages are typically regarding a declined or late payment or delivery. Other times, scammers may attempt to set up fake Amazon web pages for purchases and raffles.

**To help consumers shop safely this summer, BBB Serving Greater Cleveland is providing the following online shopping tips:**

● **Buy from reputable stores and verify websites.** Buy directly from a seller you know and trust. Double-check the URL of the website to verify that you are using the official website since scammers will impersonate widely recognized retailers.

- **Be sure the online store has working contact info.** If a company seems legitimate but you aren't familiar with it, be extra careful with your personal information. Before offering up your name, address, and credit card information, make sure the company is legitimate. A business should have basics such as a real street address and a working customer service number
- **Pay by credit card when possible.** Purchases made by credit card are protected under the Fair Credit Billing Act which allows you to dispute charges. Steer clear of any establishments or requests to pay with a gift card or other, non-traditional, method.
- **Question unusual communications.** When in doubt, reach out to a company directly using the contact information found on official websites regarding any strange emails, phone calls, or text messages you may have received.

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## Better Business Bureau® Senior Awareness Initiative

### Looking for travel deals? Don't just wing it this summer

Airline fares and other travel costs have skyrocketed this summer. Factors such as surging fuel costs and high consumer demand are driving these increases. But it's not just increased travel costs that will affect consumers. Travel delays due to weather and staff shortages have led to recent delayed and canceled flights. Besides this, consumers also have found difficulty in selecting a third-party travel service. Many times well-recognized business names are spoofed, or imitated by less reputable companies to trick users into thinking they're dealing with the hotel or airline directly.

A local businesswoman from Amherst encountered this situation when she recently took a business trip to Columbus and made a reservation for a Dublin, Ohio area hotel. She googled the hotel name and believed she was making a reservation for herself and two other guests directly with the hotel. Instead, it was a third-party booking agent named Reservation Counter, LLC. The woman was shocked when she found out she used a third-party agent which charged her fees, taxes, and rates that were considerably higher than what her hotel was asking. When she called the company, they denied her a refund.

Reservation Counter is based in Utah. BBB has received over 400 complaints from consumers in the last three years about the company. Consumers report they had issues canceling reservations and thought they had been misled into thinking they were booking directly with the hotel. In 2020, BBB submitted a written request to the company encouraging them to address the pattern of complaints. The company responded with a letter refuting the alleged claims and did not agree to take any action to resolve the pattern.

To avoid situations like this, BBB Serving Greater Cleveland is providing the following tips to help ensure an enjoyable vacation:

- **Start with BBB.** Research companies, such as hotels and travel agencies, on BBB.org. On BBB.org, customers can read reviews and view complaint detail.
- **Avoid broad internet searches.** Entering phrases like 'best deals' into a search engine can sometimes bring up websites that look official, but are not. Also, double-check web addresses to ensure you are using secure and official websites.
- **Be alert for travel scams.** Watch out for phone calls or letters touting a 'free trip' or websites offering prices that appear too good to be true. Learn more about travel scams here.
- **Get trip details in writing.** Before making a final payment, get all the details of the trip in writing. This should include the total cost, restrictions, cancellation penalties, and names of the airlines, hotels, booking sites, and travel agents. Information like this will help if a trip is canceled or one of the carriers experiences a delay.
- **Check delays.** Consumers can check flight status on carriers' websites or through their telephone reservation systems. If an airline causes a substantial delay or cancellation, consumers should read their carrier's terms and conditions to see what compensation, if any, they are entitled to.
- **Pay with a credit card.** Paying with a credit card provides additional protection if something should go wrong with the travel reservation.
- **Planning to travel internationally?** Check to see if there are any advisories affecting travel from the Department of State.



## Better Business Bureau® Senior Awareness Initiative Area Consumers Unhappy with AAA Damage Control

BBB Serving Greater Cleveland is issuing a consumer alert regarding a local plumbing company and its operator. The company, AAA Damage Control, is based in Conneaut and is run by Nolan Ryan “Scooter” Stahl. Nolan Stahl and his father Howard Stahl were previously ordered by the Pennsylvania Attorney General to pay a total of \$128,000 in restitution to customers and civil penalties as part of a 2020 Consent Petition which was entered into by both parties without trial or final adjudication of the facts or law. The pair were accused of knowingly recommending unnecessary replacement of sewer pipes and using pre-recorded video footage of damaged pipes to defraud consumers. While many restrictions were placed on the father/son team, those restrictions only apply to their work and presence in Pennsylvania.

Since the decision, Nolan Stahl started soliciting plumbing and sewer work across state lines in Ohio. A consumer from Perry filed a complaint in February and told BBB “when our septic system failed in Oct, we required someone to come look to see how to fix it. We went to Angi's list and were given AAA Damage Control as an option. We called AAA Damage control who said they could help us. The owner Nolan came out to the house and started to dig. After digging it appeared the current brick system was not holding up and Nolan recommended we install a new tank...It was a lot of money (\$11,000), but we felt it best to just get it done as he told us.” A few weeks later, the homeowners noticed a smell and puddles. They used plumbing tracing dye to confirm sewage was seeping from their septic system. The homeowners contacted Stahl who agreed to look at the issue but never came back to the property. When the consumers contacted the local health department they were advised to replace all of Stahl's work with a new system.

Another local consumer from Jefferson hired AAA Damage Control to snake a drain and paid upfront, but the work was never completed. Both complaints from consumers went unanswered by AAA Damage Control and the company currently has an “F” rating from BBB due to the length of time the company has been operating and its failure to respond to complaints.

BBB offers these additional tips to consumers who may be considering hiring a plumber.

- **Start With Trust.** Visit BBB.org to read reviews of local plumbers and BBB Accredited Businesses. Consider choosing a plumber who has a professional affiliation and is a member of organizations such as The International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials or the Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors Association. Also verify state licenses.
- **Read estimates carefully.** Review the estimate to see if a flat rate is provided for materials or if materials will be charged separately. Make sure the estimate is clear and detailed, including specifications such as the quality, type, and number of fixtures.
- **Check warranties.** Both the products and a plumber's labor will have warranties, but they may not be for the same time period. Keep copies of all warranty information and understand what it covers