**What is happening at our favorite shopping locations?**

**Threats are closing our favorite shops. Shoppers must depart while the police surround stores as criminals call in bomb threats, and demand payments in cash, gift cards, or bitcoin payments. Stores evacuate the premises as the police arrive and surround the location. The stores involved include Kroger, Walmart, Whole Foods, HyVee, Food City and other popular shops.**

**City, state and federal law enforcement agencies (FBI) are now involved, but callers use blocked numbers that are hard to trace.**

**One more note not suggested by all agencies. Do not leave any official documents in your car (glove compartment) that reveals your home address. When criminals break into your automobile, they will go straight to your glove compartment seeking a gun, and any official document (like your DMV ownership or insurance validation document). Once they have your address, they will go immediately to your home and rob it before you get home. In 30 minutes they will have gone through your bedroom (where many people hide emergency funds.) and search all locations where you might have valuables (like jewelry). (Some people suggest leaving an envelope with $100 so that they will leave with minimal damage.)**

**We now live in different times, and must be extra careful in many parts of our lives.**

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**SOURCE:**

**Bomb-Threat Scam Hits Stores**

**Kroger, Walmart and other chains say anonymous callers demanded payment**

BY JAEWON KANG, The Wall Street Journal | Page B003 Monday, 26 June 2023

Law-enforcement officials and retailers are investigating a recent wave of bomb threats across the U.S. targeting grocery operators and other stores.

**Kroger, Walmart , Amazon. com ’s Whole Foods Market and other companies have received bomb threats at stores in various areas from New Mexico to Wisconsin in recent months, according to authorities.** Some **callers demanded gift cards, bitcoin or money and threatened to detonate bombs if payments weren’t made.**

In a suburb north of Chicago, a caller told a Whole Foods Market employee a pipe bomb had been placed in the store and demanded $5,000 in bitcoin.

At a Kroger-owned store in New Mexico, an employee received a call from a suspect who asked her to wire money and said a bomb would go off if she called the police.

Store employees contacted authorities, police said, and officers helped evacuate locations. They found no suspicious items.

Businesses, entertainment venues and schools for years have dealt with bomb threats and phone scams, and hacking groups have tried to obtain information or money through cybersecurity attacks.

Bomb threats demanding ransoms are unusual and appear to be a newer avenue of extortion targeting retailers that started earlier this year, security and industry experts said.

“It’s yet another evolving scam,” said Lisa LaBruno, senior executive vice president of retail operations at the Retail Industry Leaders Association. Members of the trade group are sharing details on threats received and responses, she said.

Kroger said it is working with local law enforcement and the Federal Bureau of Investigation and that the safety of the company’s employees and customers is its top priority.

“Every single day, we worry about safety and take everything extremely serious,” said Rodney McMullen, chief executive of Kroger.

Hy-Vee, Food City and other retailers that have been targeted with similar threats said they take each incident seriously and report them to law enforcement. Walmart said it cooperates with local, state and federal investigators.

The FBI said it is working with local and state law-enforcement officials. The agency said it asks members of the public to maintain awareness of their surroundings and report any suspicious activity to law enforcement.

Police in the affected areas said they are investigating the threats, though callers have been difficult to track down because they use blocked numbers. It is unclear to authorities whether the threats are part of an organized effort and where callers are located. So far, individual stores haven’t received more than one threat and some callers didn’t demand payment, police said.

Law-enforcement officials said every call should be taken seriously. Businesses shouldn’t give money, and store staff talking to the callers should try to get as much information as possible to help identify them. It is helpful if employees are aware of the layouts of stores and can see if anything looks unusual, some officials said.

The recent rash of bomb threats targeting retailers with ransom demands began months ago and increased in the spring, said Doug Baker, vice president of industry relations at food trade group FMI.

Callers have sought payment ranging from hundreds of dollars to thousands, he said, and the trade group representing retailers, wholesalers and suppliers has informed members and is working with local FBI and Homeland Security investigations. “It’s disruptive,” Baker said, “If I’m a retailer…I’ve got to close stores and have to call law enforcement. And send customers out.” Whole Foods recommended that store leaders go through bomb-threat protocols with workers after several stores in various regions received threats seeking payment, according to a recent memo viewed by The Wall Street Journal.