

**Town of Middlebury**  
**Emergency Management Bulletin**  
**March 24, 2020 11:00 a.m.**

**CONSUMER FRAUD BULLETIN**

The Federal Bureau of Investigation has provided the following notice with respect to fraud in the distribution of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):

**Criminals Exploiting COVID-19 Outbreak for Financial Gain through Procurement and Consumer Fraud**

The FBI Criminal Investigative Division (CID), in coordination with the Office of Private Sector (OPS), prepared this LIR to address criminal exploitation of the global supply chain disruptions and manufacturing shortages resulting from the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

Recent reporting from multiple sources indicates an increase in financial fraud schemes, as scammers have seized upon the ever-growing demand for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to target healthcare providers and the general public. Many of the schemes attempt to capitalize on high demand, low supply PPE such as N95 National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)-approved respirator masks, which are among the required PPE for healthcare personnel responding to COVID-19.

The FBI has identified the following proactive measures for consumers and procurement personnel to help mitigate financial loss or the purchase of potentially harmful counterfeit N95 masks. These recommendations are not meant to be an exhaustive list of guidance regarding COVID-19:

- When ordering PPE from online retailers, always verify the Uniform Resource Locator (URL) and confirm “https” in the web address, as a lack of a security certification (“https”) may be an indicator that the site is insecure or compromised
- Consult the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) NIOSH website at [https://cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/topics/respirators/disp\\_part/default.html](https://cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/topics/respirators/disp_part/default.html) to view a list of all NIOSH approved manufacturers of N95 respirator masks and validate approval and certification numbers
- Confirm N95 respirator mask approval status and certification numbers using the NIOSH flyer, the NIOSH website, or the CDC website, which includes examples of identified counterfeit or unapproved N95 respirator masks
- If procuring other categories of PPE such as gowns, gloves, goggles, and face shields, consult the manufacturer to verify authenticity and availability
- Be wary of unprompted solicitations to purchase large quantities of PPE and do not provide usernames, passwords, personal identifying information (PII) such as social security number and date of birth, or financial information in response to an email or robocall.

As of 11 March 2020, many large U.S. retailers and suppliers have sold out of their N95 respirator mask inventories and are now warning consumers against the rise of counterfeit versions. A survey of safety masks and respirators on one U.S. e-commerce platform found at least one hundred product listings that were counterfeit or unapproved.

Between 1 December 2019 and 11 March 2020, procurement entities and distributors looking to source N95 respirator masks and protective gowns reported combined losses exceeding \$3.6 million. The most common scam was the solicitation and subsequent non-delivery of purchase orders of N95 respirator masks and protective gowns after victims sent money.

In at least one FBI complaint in February 2020, an alleged fraudster conducted a non-delivery scam and contacted the victim to say their product was delayed due to trade disruptions resultant of COVID-19.

If you believe your organization has purchased counterfeit PPE or COVID-19 testing kits, or were the victim of a fraud or scam, please contact your local FBI Field Office and report details regarding this incident to the Internet Crimes Complaints Center at [IC3.gov](https://www.ic3.gov) and/or the National Intellectual Property Rights Coordination Center at [IPRCenter.gov](https://www.iprcenter.gov).

Due to global shortages and prioritization of healthcare institutions, the CDC advises only healthcare personnel, infected individuals, and those caring for infected individuals obtain N95 respirator masks.

The best source for accurate, up-to-date information is the U.S. CDC at <https://www.cdc.gov/> and <https://www.coronavirus.gov/>.

### Generic sample of a respirator mask with appropriate markings

