

The River Cities  
**DAILY TRIBUNE**

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## **Gotcha! You Can't Believe Everything in Your Email**

I doubt that anyone will be shocked to hear that some of the email you get is just not true. If you recently received emails telling you that Sotomayor has said that all white males should be castrated, or pictures from the inside of the ill fated Air France Flight 447 or pictures of a gun totin' bikini clad Sarah Palin, and you bought it, someone Gotcha. These are just three in the long history of hoax emails. The people who track these say that there are several hundred a week. The motivations for starting a hoax email are not clear but we know that some start out as an inside joke intended for a few friends. Others have political or other propaganda motives, some are heart-tuggers that bring out the best in us, a desire to help, and some are designed to carry links for people to download malware. Whatever the original motivations we know that they can catch on if they are something people want to forward and can turn into hundreds of thousands of emails almost literally overnight.

Some are fun and, I have to admit, I've forwarded a few myself but we should all try to resist the temptation. As Jim Graham, the founder of [hoaxbusters.org](http://hoaxbusters.org), recently said, "Hoaxes can cause panic, anxiety, and stress to individual recipients. In the business world, they can lead to lost productivity, take up valuable network bandwidth, and present a serious security issue." Moreover, he added, "to a spammer, the addresses found in forwarded e-mails are like finding gold." But kicking the habit begins with recognizing the problem.

HoaxBusters website lists the "5 Telltale Signs of an Internet Hoax".

- \* The e-mail will have a sense of urgency about it, and probably a lot of exclamation points in it.
- \* The e-mail will insist that you tell all your friends.
- \* The text is adamant that this is "NOT a hoax."
- \* It will earnestly inform you that there are dire consequences for not participating.
- \* It probably is full of >>>> marks, showing that it has fooled a lot of people before you, and has been forwarded all over the planet. Don't add any more!

If you think an email may be the exception, that is factual and honest, and worth sending on to those on your mailing list I ask two favors. First, check one of the several on-line sources like [Snopes.com](http://Snopes.com), [HoaxBusters.org](http://HoaxBusters.org), [UrbanLegends.About.com](http://UrbanLegends.About.com) or [truthorfiction.com](http://truthorfiction.com) to see if the email has made the list of thousands of hoaxes. All of the sites have a good 'table of contents' of categories on their first page and powerful search engines that allow you to search by any key word in the suspect email. If after checking you still think it is worth sending to your many friends and relatives do not address

everyone using the To: in your email program. Instead, be courteous and put all the addresses in the bcc: list. That way none of the recipients can see all the other email addresses. Just this week I got a hoax email from a local friend with an outstanding contact list. It was truly an A list of local business people, celebrities and government officials. I found it quite useful as a way to update my own mailing list.

As an all too frequent recipient of these emails I try to do my part to stop the insanity. I generally email the sender to let them know that the email they are forwarding is a hoax and send them the link to one of the authoritative sources I've listed above. It is always tempting to hit 'reply all' and let the entire list know how lazy the sender was to waste our time and mailbox space rather than check the email themselves, but I usually don't. Unfortunately, there are some people that simply will not believe that a message is a hoax regardless of how compelling the evidence you present to them. The one I had the hardest time not believing was that green M&M's are an aphrodisiac. Maybe they are if you wash them down with Coke and aspirin.

Check out our website for some more good sources of information on hoaxes, urban legends and other email junk.

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