



United States Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation

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FBI SPRINGFIELD

SCAMS

For Immediate Release:

This press release is designed to enhance public awareness about various fraudulent schemes operating in Illinois, and elsewhere. Through such awareness, community members will be better prepared to avoid becoming victims of these schemes and scams.

Fraudulent telemarketing scams are estimated to cost over 40 billion dollars a year. The Department of Justice estimates the number of American consumers defrauded each year by fraudulent telemarketing at one in six. Fraudulent telemarketers are continuing to target elderly citizens in disproportionate numbers. Some of the more common scams that continue to be a concern include:

- a) Nigerian Letters;
- b) Lottery/Sweepstakes Scams;
- c) Internet Auction Fraud.

NIGERIAN LETTERS

Individuals and businesses continue to receive letters from Nigeria through the mail, over fax machines, and over e-mail. These letters appear to come from a prominent individual or company with access to a substantial sum of money. The writer purports to need someone with a bank account outside Nigeria to facilitate recovery of this large sum of money. These Nigerian scam letters have been going around for years and there are now numerous versions which may appear to originate from outside Nigeria. Do not provide bank account information, or other personal information based upon these letters.

LOTTERY/SWEEPSTAKES SCAMS

This scam involves the victim receiving notification, either by telephone or mail, that the victim has won a large sum of money, typically from Canada, although they may originate elsewhere. The victim is then convinced to pay money, under the guise of customs taxes, processing fees, or as a fee to convert the winnings to United States currency, as a prerequisite to receiving the winnings. Do not send money as a condition of receiving lottery or sweepstakes winnings. It is a violation of Federal Trade Commission (FTC) trade rules to require a purchase as a condition of entering a contest, sweepstakes, or other promotion. Also, it is illegal to play a foreign lottery through the mail or on the telephone or internet (Title 18 United States Code, section 1301-1307).

PROJECT COLT was formed in 1998 to address fraudulent telemarketing emanating from Canada. The *PROJECT COLT* task force is comprised of officers from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), FBI, U.S. Customs Service, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Montreal City Police, and the Quebec Provincial Police. These schemes generate over \$120 million dollars each year. Canadian based fraud complaints may be made through PHONEBUSTERS:

1-888-495-8501 (Phonebusters Hotline)
info@phonebusters.com

INTERNET AUCTION FRAUD

This scam involves a “buyer” expressing an interest in purchasing something, typically over the internet. The buyer will then send a check to the victim in an amount above the purchase price. The buyer explains why the check is higher than the purchase price and asks the victim to send the balance back to the buyer. The victim, believing the certified check is good, then forwards the excess money back to the buyer. The check sent by the buyer is counterfeit and the buyer has no interest in purchasing anything. Sellers should be cautious of a buyer who wants to send a check for an amount above the purchase price. Sellers should be cautious of sending merchandise or money back to the buyer, without first ensuring that the buyers form of payment is legitimate.

RED FLAGS TO WATCH FOR

a) Pressure: Scammers will often pressure the victim to act quickly. The “opportunity” is only available for a limited time, or the prize will be given to someone else if not claimed;

b) Pay up Front: A scam will often require the victim to pay money up front in order to take advantage of the “opportunity.” No legitimate contest requires a winner to pay money up front to claim the winnings;

c) Will not Send Written Information: The scammer will rarely send written documentation to the victim, because that provides the victim time to think about the situation, as well as provides the victim the means of checking out the operation/organization;

d) Excuses: The scammer will often be unable to answer legitimate questions posed by the victim. They will provide excuses rather than directly address such questions and concerns. They will even become upset because the victim is questioning the caller by threatening to provide the opportunity to someone else if the victim is not interested.

DO'S AND DON'TS

DO ask for the business/organization name and address (many will not provide this information, because it is something that may be verified);

DO ask for written information. This gives the potential victim the opportunity to examine the offer and talk to others about the offer;

DO talk to family and friends about the situation. A second opinion is always a good idea. Something that sounds too good to be true, normally is;

DO call the Better Business Bureau (BBB) if you are unfamiliar with a business;

DON'T pay to receive lottery/contest winnings;

DON'T allow the caller to pressure you to ACT NOW!;

DON'T give out bank account numbers, credit card numbers, or other personal information to anyone you did not initiate contact with and you know is a reputable business.

RESOURCES

“The FBI will continue to work with our law enforcement partners in addressing these fraudulent schemes.” Weysan Dun, FBI Special Agent in Charge of the Springfield Division. In addition to your local FBI office and local police agencies, the following resources are available:

Internet Fraud: All federal internet fraud complaints are centralized through the Internet Fraud Complaint Center (IFCC). Because internet fraud is not geographically limited, a centralized complaint center allows all related complaints to be connected and referred to the appropriate agency. Over the past year, more than 50 Cyber-Crime task forces have been established, or significantly enhanced, from several federal, state, and local agencies. The IFCC website offers a complaint form that may be submitted online.

www.ifccfbi.gov

Telemarketing Fraud: The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) enters all telemarketing, identity theft, and other fraud complaints into *Consumer Sentinel*, which is a secure database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad. The FTC offers a telemarketing fraud hotline, as well as a website:

1-877-FTC-HELP (877-382-4357)

www.ftc.gov

Identity Theft: The FTC also offers a separate Identity Theft hotline, to address identity theft complaints:

1-877-ID-THEFT (877-438-4338)

www.consumer.gov/idtheft

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