



BILL THIEBAUT
District Attorney

OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
TENTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT, COLORADO

STACIE HARRIS
Legal Assistant

Scam Alert – May 2010

by Stacie Harris, Economic Crimes Unit

Illegal Lotteries

Different types of scams are being perpetrated all the time. We are all recovering from the economy blues and when you're presented with an opportunity of a windfall of cash, it's difficult to resist and it will make the most rational people think very irrationally.

Scams seem to be perpetrated on a constant rotating basis. After trying one scam and finding that it is just not paying off in an area, they move on to the next scam. The current scam of choice in our community appears to be the "Foreign Lottery Scam".

The last time the District Attorney's Office felt the need to put an alert out on lottery scams here in our community was in November 2008. Over the past 18 months, our office received a call here and there, but over the last couple of weeks, we have received approximately 25 calls on lottery scams. Falling victim of a scam causes frustration and embarrassment, and most times goes unreported. If not reported, law enforcement has no idea when our community is at risk.

How does a foreign lottery scam work?

*First, it should not work because **participating in any foreign lottery is a violation of federal law.***

You will be contacted either by phone, letter or email stating that you have won a large sum in a lottery and for that money to be released, you will need to wire your hard-earned money to cover taxes, tariff fees or things of that nature. You are told that once the money is wired, you are to supply a tracking number. You will then either never receive the promised winnings, or you may receive what appears to be a valid check. Once you deposit that check into your bank, they will place a hold on it. It more than likely will come back as a non-existent account or even as a stolen account number from another unsuspecting victim. If you were to start drawing money out of your account against that fraudulent check, the bank can, and will, hold you legally responsible for the funds that you will need to replace. Criminal charges could be filed against you if the funds are not replaced.

As most scams are committed by people located in other countries, it is not easy to track and trace the perpetrator. Although you may have been given a phone number and an address and think you can help law enforcement pinpoint exactly who the perpetrator is, it more than likely is not the case. The name and phone numbers that you see show up on your caller i.d. are either fake names and numbers (called spoofing) or a disposable phone that cannot be traced.

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Remember that tracking number you were asked to provide when you wired your money to cover the taxes or tariff fees? With that tracking number, the con-artist is able to pick up that money anywhere.

Participation in any foreign lottery - whether it's offered by phone, mail, or email - is a violation of federal law. They may even attempt to fool you by saying they are from a lottery company located in the United States. Anytime you are doing business over the phone, email or by mail, you are taking a risk of being scammed when you don't know the other person at the other end.

Lottery scams perpetrated by mail that are postmarked as originating in Canada, can be reported to the Canadian Anti-Fraud Call Centre by calling toll-free 1-888-495-8501. This was an organization that was created to assist the Canadian police in their efforts to put a stop to this type of fraud. Mail solicitations from any other country need to be reported to your local postmaster.

If you receive this type of scam by e-mail, stop corresponding with them immediately. File a complaint with the Internet Crime Complaint Center at www.ic3.gov. You should run a virus scan on your computer for any virus, malware and spyware that may have been received within the email. You can contact your internet provider for further guidance on setting filters to prevent anymore damage. Your biggest defense against this type of attack, **never open an email if you do not know who it is from.**

If you receive this type of scam by phone, be prepared for more calls as they're going to either call you back to convince you or intimidate you, or they will add your name and number to a list that they sell to other scam hustlers to contact you. Just remember, you are on your phone in your house and have the right to end the call at any time. Staying on the line with them just encourages them.

You should also contact your local police or sheriff's department to make an informational report as well as a phone call to the District Attorney's Office so that it may be noted for tracking purposes of the types of scams affecting our community.

IDENTIFY A SCAM BEFORE A SCAM IDENTIFIES YOU!

