



THE SAVVY CONSUMER COLUMN

The Savvy Consumer
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 7, 2010

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Consumer Affairs warns of scams involving foreign lotteries, fake checks

Nashville, TN – The Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs warns consumers to be aware of foreign lottery and fake check scams. Scams like these take place every day, and their goal is to get your money or personal information. Consumers may receive notification via telephone, e-mail or direct mail, telling them they have won foreign lotteries from Canada and as far away as Europe. The e-mails ask consumers to reply with their personal information in order to receive the winnings. The scammers take that information. The consumers, of course, never get any lottery money.

A consumer who receives a lottery notification letter in the mail usually finds a check enclosed. The letter claims the consumer has won and asks him to cash the check and to wire or mail a portion of the fake winnings back to cover supposed insurance and fees. A contact name and phone number may even be provided "to assist with verification and processing." The checks look legitimate, and many consumers will cash them – never suspecting that the checks are counterfeit. Before the check clears, the consumer uses money already in his account to wire the fees back to the third party. Ultimately, once the check does not clear the bank, the consumer is financially responsible for it.

Consumer Affairs offers these words of caution:

- Ignore all mail, e-mail and phone solicitations for foreign lottery promotions. Federal law prohibits mailing lottery tickets, ads or payments to purchase tickets in a foreign lottery.
- Don't give out personal information, including account numbers, to a salesperson.
- If you buy a foreign lottery ticket, you may land on a "suckers list" that crooks trade.
- Businesses in other countries may be difficult to locate if a problem arises.
- There is no legitimate reason why someone would give you a check or money order and ask you to wire or send money in return.
- No legitimate contest will make you pay a fee to collect a prize.
- You can't win a contest you didn't enter. If it looks too good to be true, it probably is.

For more information or to report a fraud, please contact the Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs at 1-800-342-8385 or www.tennessee.gov/consumer.

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