

April 2009

Fraud Alert!

FTC Warns Consumers About Economic Stimulus Scams

The FTC is warning consumers that they could get stung by an economic stimulus scam. The scams come in different forms.

Right now, on the Web and in e-mail, scammers are telling consumers they can help them qualify for a payment from President Obama's economic stimulus package. All they have to do is provide a little information or a small payment.

E-mail messages may ask for bank account information so that the operators can deposit consumers' share of the stimulus directly into their bank account. Instead, the scammers drain consumers' accounts of money and disappear. Alternatively, bogus e-mail may appear to be from government agencies and ask for information to "verify" that you qualify for a payment. The scammers use that information to commit identity theft. Some e-mail scams do not ask for information, but provide links to find out how to qualify for funds. By clicking on the links, consumers have downloaded malicious software or spyware that can be used for identity theft.

"Web sites may advertise that they can help you get money from the stimulus fund. Many use deceptive names or images of President Obama and Vice President Biden to suggest they are legitimate. They're not," says Eileen Harrington, Acting Director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection. "Don't fall for it. If you do, you'll get scammed." Some sites suggest that for a small sum of money - as little as \$1.99 in some cases - consumers can get a list of economic stimulus grants. Two things can happen: the number of the credit card the consumer uses to pay the fee can fall into the hands of scam artists, or the \$1.99 can be the down payment on a "negative option" agreement that may cost hundreds or thousands of dollars if the consumer does not cancel.

"Consumers who may already have fallen for these scams should carefully check their credit card bills for unauthorized charges and report scams to the FTC," Harrington said.

The Federal Trade Commission works for consumers to prevent fraudulent, deceptive, and unfair business practices and to provide information to help spot, stop, and avoid them. To file a complaint in English or Spanish, visit the FTC's online Complaint Assistant or call 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357). The FTC enters complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to more than 1,500 civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad. If you have questions or require further information, please contact one of the Task Force agencies listed below.

BUCKS COUNTY CRIMES AGAINST OLDER ADULTS TASK FORCE

Bucks County District Attorney's Office

215-348-6344

Bucks County Area Agency on Aging

215-348-0510

Bucks County Coroner's Office

215-348-3852

Network of Victim Assistance (NOVA)

1-800-675-6900

A Woman's Place (AWP)

1-800-220-8116

Bucks County Office of Consumer Protection

215-348-6060

Bucks County Register of Wills

215-348-6265

US Dept. of Health and Human Services

Investigations, Office of the Inspector General

www.crimesagainstolderadultsbucks.org

24 - HOUR HOTLINE 1-800-490-8505