

FRAUD ALERT!

July 2008

Sweepstakes

Winning a large sweepstakes prize is a dream come true for many people. However, that dream can quickly turn into a nightmare if the win notification was actually a **sweepstakes scam**. Consequences can be severe but by learning to recognize the top warning signs of a sweepstakes scam, you can avoid becoming a victim of fraud.

1. Sweepstakes Scams Use Free E-mail Accounts

It is possible that small legitimate sweepstakes sponsors could notify you with a free email address. However, be weary if you receive a win notice claiming to be from a BIG company and the email arrives from a free account like Hotmail or Gmail.

2. Sweepstakes Scams Require You Pay to Receive the Prize

Legitimate sweepstakes **will never** ask you to pay fees to participate or to receive a prize. You should never have to pay handling charges, service fees, or any other kind of charges up front. Sweepstakes taxes are paid directly to the IRS.

3. Sweepstakes Scams Tell You You've Won - But You Don't Recognize the Contest

You can only win a sweepstakes or lottery that you enter. If you like to enter several different types of sweepstakes, always organize copies of your entry forms so it is easy to research when you receive a sweepstakes "award letter."

4. Sweepstakes Scams Instruct You to Wire Money

Scammers want to ensure that they receive your money before you realize you have been defrauded. To make sure this happens, criminals ask you to use a wire transfer service to receive illicit funds. "Wired" funds are handled like cash and nearly impossible to trace who received the wire transfer and just as unlikely to get your money returned.

5. Sweepstakes Scams Pressure You to Provide Personal Information

Never provide your personal information to ANYONE over the phone, especially sweepstakes/lottery callers. A legitimate sweepstakes will not send wins by direct deposit or need to verify credit card and/or checking account numbers.

6. Sweepstakes Scams Can Pose As Government Organizations

To appear more legitimate, some sweepstakes scams pretend to come from government organizations such as the Federal Trade Commission or the "National Sweepstakes Board" (which does not exist). Real sweepstakes sponsors will send win notifications directly to the winners and have no reason to involve government organizations.

7. Sweepstakes Scam Notifications Are Usually Sent Via Bulk Mail With Many Typos

When a legitimate sweepstakes sponsor sends out win notifications, they use first class postage or delivery services like FedEx or UPS. Sweepstakes scam artists want to keep their profits high so they send scam letters by bulk mail to take advantage of the postage savings. Never trust a win by bulk mail and be aware of glaring errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Many scams originate outside of the U.S., mostly composed by people with poor command of the language.

If you have been the victim of sweepstakes fraud, or you know someone else who has been, reporting the scam to the proper authorities may help catch the criminals before they can prey on another innocent victim. You can report to:

- **The United States Postal Service**
If you are a U.S. citizen and you received a scam letter in the mail, you can report it to your local post office.
- **Your Local Police Department**
File a police report with your local department and keep copies of all documents that relate to the scam.
- **The Federal Trade Commission** 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357)
The Federal Trade Commission collects information about current scams and frauds and directs it to law enforcement officials.
- **The Bucks County Crimes Against Older Adults Task Force** (contact information below)

BUCKS COUNTY CRIMES AGAINST OLDER ADULTS TASK FORCE

FIGHTING ABUSE, NEGLECT, AND EXPLOITATION OF OLDER ADULTS IN BUCKS COUNTY

Bucks County District Attorney's Office
215-348-6344

Bucks County Area Agency on Aging
215-348-0510

Bucks County Consumer Protection
215-348-6060

Network of Victim Assistance
1-800-675-6900

Bucks County Register of Wills
215-348-6265

Bucks County Coroner
215-348-3852