



State of Michigan
Attorney General Bill Schuette

International Sweepstakes & Lottery Fraud

CONSUMER ALERT

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The Attorney General provides Consumer Alerts to inform the public of unfair, misleading, or deceptive business practices, and to provide information and guidance on other issues of concern. Consumer Alerts are not legal advice, legal authority, or a binding legal opinion from the Department of Attorney General.

INTERNATIONAL SWEEPSTAKES & LOTTERY FRAUD

Frequently, letters circulate purporting to be from some official-sounding company informing recipients that they have won hundreds of thousands of dollars in a foreign lottery. Recipients are asked to keep this award top secret. When consumers contact the "issuing authority," they are asked to provide banking and other personal information.

Potential victims are also asked to provide money in advance to cover insurance, administrative, or other costs. Some mailings have even included a fake cashier's check. Victims may cash the check and forward money to cover some expense. Consumers must be alert to the fact that just because money from the check may be made quickly available does not mean a check is valid. The check must go back to the originating bank and it must clear. This process can take several days and, in the case of an elaborate counterfeit, may take a few weeks.

Additionally, bank information, including void checks, can be used or modeled to create counterfeit checks and clean out the victim's bank accounts. Other personal information provided can be used to fraudulently obtain credit cards and purchase merchandise.

The perpetrators of this fraud are relying on victims confusing the scam with the legitimate national Spanish lottery that is nicknamed "El Gordo" ("the Fat One").

Potential victims should keep in mind the following:

- Never provide any personal information to a company or an individual who calls you on the phone or to somebody who sends you a letter indicating you won a foreign sweepstakes or lottery;

- Legitimate lottery tickets can only be purchased from authorized ticket sellers. If you have not made a purchase, you cannot win a prize;
- Legitimate lotteries do not ask winners to pay money in order to collect winnings.
- It is Illegal To Play a Foreign Lottery

Words of caution for consumers who are thinking about responding to a foreign lottery:

- If you play a foreign lottery through the mail or over the telephone, you are violating federal law.
- If you purchase one foreign lottery ticket, expect many more bogus offers for lottery or investment "opportunities." Your name will be placed on "sucker lists" that con-artists buy and sell.

Most foreign lottery solicitations sent to addressees in the U.S. do not come from foreign government agencies or licensees. Instead, they come from "bootleggers" who seek exorbitant fees from those wishing to play. The activities of bootleggers are neither being controlled nor monitored by the government of the country in which they are located. Typically, those who pay the required fees never see any lottery tickets issued by the government-operated lottery they are hoping to enter. They are left to rely on various forms of entry "confirmation" issued by the bootleggers.

REPORT FRAUD

These con-artists target senior citizens. It is important to be alert to any sign that a vulnerable family member is being victimized and to discuss such fraud with loved ones and caregivers. If you receive one of the fraudulent foreign lottery or sweepstakes letters - or any similar material that you deem suspicious - turn the entire mail piece over to your local postmaster or the nearest Postal Inspector.

An online Postal Inspector office locator is available at:
<https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/forms/MailFraudComplaint.aspx>.