

*Just the facts on...*

# Sweepstakes/Lottery Scams



You think it's your lucky day, and that's just what these scammers want you to believe. In actuality you are the target of one of the oldest something-for-nothing scams in the books.

## **How it works:**

This scam begins with a letter or telephone call claiming you have won a foreign lottery or sweepstakes contest. The letter or call will describe the contest and your winnings and often contains a check, usually for several thousand dollars. A representative may even call you to confirm your winnings. Unfortunately, it's not your lucky day.

The letter will instruct you to send a money order to cover "administrative fees," a "processing fee," or "prize taxes" immediately after depositing the check. The check you receive appears to be legitimate, but it is actually a fake.

The scammer is counting on you sending the money order to cover "fees" or "taxes" before the bank has time to process the check and determine it is fraudulent.

In other scenarios the scammers ask that you pay these fees up front before you can collect your "prize."

In either case, the scammers disappear with your money.

## **All shapes and sizes:**

Prize contests may take many different looks. Some are cleverly disguised as international lottery contests that include actual checks made payable to you. Others are lengthy phone recordings that virtually describe the color of the sand at your island getaway resort.

Claims of monetary awards may be quite large, even several million dollars, or more modestly set at a couple thousand dollars. Don't let a small "winning" fool you into believing.



**South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs**

2221 Devine Street, Suite 200, Columbia, SC 29205

Phone: 803.734.4200 or 1.800.922.1594

E-mail: [scdca@scconsumer.gov](mailto:scdca@scconsumer.gov) or visit [www.scconsumer.gov](http://www.scconsumer.gov) 07/2011

## Contest clues: How to tell it's a scam

The following tips should clue you in that your winnings may be part of a scam:

- The letter contains poor grammar.
- Pressure you to act quickly.
- The letter or representative tells you to pay fees or taxes to claim your prize. Legitimate prize contests never require you to pay for your winnings.
- The letter or representative claims you've won a contest you didn't enter.
- The contest is based in a foreign country. Foreign lottery contests are illegal.



**There is no pot of gold at the end of the rainbow and you did not win the foreign lottery. Don't buy into fool's gold.**

## Catching the crooks:

Finding the person(s) responsible for a contest scam may be quite difficult. These contest "representatives" regularly change company names, phone numbers, mailing addresses, and physical locations.

Authorities are often unable to follow a paper trail to these criminals because the checks are not genuine. Consequently, countless numbers of individuals are initiating contest scams.

Cautious and preventative "consumerism" will do more to stop these crooks than most authorities are able to do.

## Suspect a Scam?

If you have been contacted by a fraudulent sweepstakes or lottery scam, contact:

South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs  
2221 Devine Street Suite 200  
Columbia, SC 29204  
803.734.4200  
1.800.922.1594  
[www.sconsumer.gov](http://www.sconsumer.gov)

