



# ATTORNEY GENERAL WARNS OF TOP FIVE SCAMS AGAINST SENIOR TEXANS

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

SENIOR TEXANS ARE A top priority of my administration, not just during May, which is Older Americans Month, but all year long. Fraud against seniors is more widespread than most people realize, and timely information about the latest scams that target senior Texans can be a powerful protective weapon. Just knowing about some of the most common tactics used by con artists may be enough to keep seniors from losing their life savings.

Five schemes in particular continue to be reported to my Consumer Protection Office: phony sweepstakes and foreign lotteries; home repair scams; identity theft; investment scams; and bogus charities.

**Phony sweepstakes and foreign lotteries.** As tempting as it sounds, be assured that you did not win the Spanish lottery, or the Canadian lottery, or any other foreign lottery. Perpetrators of these frauds and similar sweepstakes schemes send official-looking announcements or place phone calls posing as government officials, with promises that you have won a large sum of money, usually in the form of a major prize, winnings from a lottery or an “inheritance.” To collect the money, they say, they must first collect “fees” and “taxes” from you in advance or verify your bank account information so that the money can be wired to you. Shred the announcement or JUST HANG UP! This is known as advance fee fraud and its promoters are very persistent and persuasive. Do not be intimidated or bullied by a fast-talking phone operator making these kinds of claims.

Seniors wise to these types of scams are now being confronted by another twist: the phony cashier’s check. The scammers at-

tempt to trick the victim into thinking the prize has already been sent by sending the victim a phony cashier’s check. The counterfeits are so good sometimes that even banks have been fooled. The victim then lets down his or her guard, believing that they’ve actually received the money, and sends money for the fees or taxes. The cashier’s check turns out to be worthless and the victim’s money is gone. My office has seen several cases in which seniors have been scammed out of their life savings by this trick.

**Home repair scams.** Be extremely cautious of unsolicited door-to-door home repair sales. Shady contractors may offer to pour a new driveway or repair your roof if you pay them cash in advance for the project. Don’t pay for work that has not been done. Use bonded or licensed contractors or builders and get the terms of any warranties in writing. Ask for references from other customers and don’t be rushed into signing a contract just because someone came to your door with a “one-time-only” special deal. Most likely, they are looking for one senior Texan to fall for their scam and then they skip town without performing the work.

**Identity theft.** Stealing personal information from seniors is one of the lowest forms of crime, but one of the most prevalent. These kinds of crooks are not above rifling through your mail or trash to get what they need to steal your identity. Remember: SHRED IT! Shred all documents that contain personal information, including financial statements, pre-approved credit offers and insurance forms. Check catalogues and magazine subscriptions to be sure your credit card number is not on the cover or

mail order form. Never give anyone who calls you your Social Security number, bank account number or credit card number for any reason. Remember, you are entitled to one free credit report from each of the three credit reporting bureaus each year.

**Investment scams.** My office has had several reports of senior Texans being taken in by “once-in-a-lifetime” investment opportunities and other strategies guaranteeing huge future returns on bogus investments. One senior lost over \$200,000 in a phony currency market and another elderly Texan lost over \$300,000 in a fraudulent property development scheme. Talk to an experienced attorney when considering retirement-oriented investments, financial planning services, estate planning and legal services that target senior Texans.

**Bogus charities.** I commend charitable giving, but urge you to ask questions before you donate. Does the solicitor have identification? How will your money be used? Don’t fall for tearful stories and heartbreaking pictures. Check the facts and make sure your gift counts. If you aren’t sure if an organization is legitimate, contact [www.give.org](http://www.give.org). This website is maintained by the Council of Better Business Bureaus to promote wise charitable giving. Remember to confirm the tax-exempt status of any organization to which you choose to make a donation.

Con artists tend to spend money just as fast as they steal it, so money lost in these or similar scams against senior Texans is hard to recover. Prevention is an important key to stopping thieves in their tracks. During Older Americans Month and throughout the year we remain committed to serving and protecting senior citizens across Texas.

## POINTS TO REMEMBER



### TOP FIVE SCAMS TARGETING SENIOR TEXANS

- You did not win millions in a sweepstakes or foreign lottery! JUST HANG UP!
- Beware of unsolicited door-to-door home repair offers. Do not pay for uncompleted work.
- Destroy all documents that contain sensitive financial information. JUST SHRED IT!
- Beware of guaranteed huge returns on investments. Consult an experienced attorney to talk about living trusts, annuities and estate planning.
- Investigate before you make a charitable contribution. Contact [www.give.org](http://www.give.org) if you are unsure about the authenticity of an organization.

For a free copy of your credit report:

Annual Credit Report Request Service  
P.O. Box 105281 Atlanta, GA 30348-5281  
877-322-8228  
[www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com)

To report a scam, contact the Attorney General’s office at (800) 252-8011 or visit our website at [www.oag.state.tx.us](http://www.oag.state.tx.us).



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