



BEWARE OF INTERNATIONAL DRIVER'S LICENSE SCAMS

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

MANUFACTURING FALSE IDENTIFICATIONS has become an increasingly profitable criminal enterprise. Though many fake ID manufacturers are small-time operators who work in the shadows, the boldest among them are advertising fake international driver's licenses and claiming their products are entirely legal. These scams often leave their victims on the wrong side of the law.

International driver's license manufacturers generally market their unlawful products to persons who lack official citizenship documentation. They also target residents who lack the ability to drive legally in the U.S., including citizens whose state-issued driver's licenses have been suspended or revoked.

Anyone who presents a fake international driver's license to law enforcement authorities as a legal form of identification could face real legal trouble. These documents are not worth the paper on which they are printed.

The Office of the Attorney General recently charged a Houston company with manufacturing and selling fake international driver's licenses. In that case, the defendants were selling their illegal products for as much as \$225 per document.

Advertising campaigns in several states, which targeted the Hispanic

community, claimed the licenses were "100% LEGAL IDs" and promised that purchasers need not be state residents. In addition, the defendants inaccurately promised that possessing an international driver's license would expedite the buyer's ability to purchase and insure motor vehicles. The sellers also falsely claimed their licenses were authorized by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

Our investigation indicates the defendants have never been authorized to issue international driver's licenses by any legitimate government entity, including the State of Texas, the U.S. government or the United Nations.

The Houston case is not our first encounter with this type of fraudulent enterprise. In 2003, the Office of the Attorney General shut down two companies that operated similar schemes. One defendant sold the fraudulent licenses from Dallas and Houston retail outlets.

While international driver's licenses do not legally exist, a legitimate government-issued document called an International Driving Permit allows non-citizens to drive in foreign countries. This document translates a valid government-issued driver's license into several different languages. Foreign drivers can therefore present it

to local authorities who are unable to read or understand the driver's home-state license. International Driving Permits are often incorrectly referred to as international driver's licenses – a confusion that is easily exploited by enterprising criminals.

The U. S. recognizes International Driving Permits under the 1949 International Convention on Road Traffic (ICRT) treaty. Only countries that have joined the treaty officially recognize these permits.

The U. S. State Department has authorized only two American organizations to issue the ICRT permits: the American Automobile Association (AAA) and the American Automobile Touring Alliance (AATA). These organizations are only allowed to sell permits to drivers over the age of 18 who possess valid driver's licenses issued by a U.S. state or territory.

While the AAA and the AATA charge \$10-\$15 for each International Driving Permit, the Federal Trade Commission reports that scam artists charge between \$65 and \$350 for fraudulent international driver's licenses.

For more information on international driver's license scams, visit the FTC's Web site at www.ftc.gov or the Office of the Attorney General's Web site at www.texasattorneygeneral.gov.

POINTS TO REMEMBER



INTERNATIONAL DRIVER'S LICENSE SCAM

International driver's licenses are not valid documents. U.S. residents who are traveling overseas may apply for an international driving permit by contacting one of two government-authorized issuers:

AAA (American Automobile Association)
1000 AAA Drive
Heathrow, FL 32745-5063
www.aaa.com

National Auto Club
1151 E. Hillsdale Blvd.
Foster City, CA 94404
www.nationalautoclub.com

For more information on this and other consumer topics, visit the Office of the Attorney General's Web site at www.texasattorneygeneral.gov



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