

Won the lottery? Just hang up!



By Greg Abbott
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Do you occasionally get colorful and official-looking announcements in the mail saying that you have won a sweepstakes, a phony lottery or some kind of cash drawing that you don't even remember signing up for? Throw it away. Ignore the phone calls, too.

Phony lotteries and sweepstakes are one of the most devastating frauds facing consumers today. Seniors in particular are targeted by unscrupulous crooks willing to say just about anything to get their money.

The OAG has launched a new public awareness campaign to reach more consumers who are in danger of falling prey to this kind of scam. It's called "Just Hang Up!"

Many phony lottery scams begin with a phone call. That should be an immediate warning. If you had won a real lottery, not only would you have bought a ticket, it would also be up to you to present your winning ticket to claim your prize. The Texas Lottery does not call you up to tell you that you've won. **JUST HANG UP!**

It is illegal to buy or sell tickets for a foreign lottery across state lines or international boundaries. Of course, most of the time, when consumers

are told they have won a fabulous prize, they have not actually bought a ticket. That is another sign of a phony lottery. If you didn't buy a ticket, you couldn't win a real lottery. Don't even listen to them. **JUST HANG UP!**

The most dangerous sign that a lottery or sweepstakes is a fraud is when they ask you to send money before you can claim your prize. They say you will receive money, but the reality is, **YOU** are going to give **THEM** money. **JUST HANG UP!**

The real lottery doesn't work that way. If you win, you get money. But with phony lotteries and sweepstakes, callers talk about all the money you are going to get, but also about fees, the cost of wire transfers and even taxes.

When you win the lottery, you pay taxes. But you don't pay the tax before you get your winnings. You pay it after. And it's the IRS you're dealing with, not the lottery.

Unfortunately, some people cannot help falling for a tall tale that they want so much to believe. In many of the sad cases we learn about, the victim needs the money for a family member or an ailing spouse. They end up losing whatever they had.

We hear about people who lose tens of thousands of dollars. But often, solicitations begin with relatively small sums. Victims may think, "Well, it's only \$20 and if it's true I'll

have \$20 million. What's the harm in sending a little bit?"

Once a consumer responds, the scam artists will become more aggressive and relentless. Some victims received pounds of junk mail about phony lotteries and sweepstakes and other scams every day in the mail. In addition, their phones ring non-stop.

These crooks will say anything and can be very persuasive. We have found, by recording actual calls, that they can also be intimidating and abusive. Many victims know better than to fall for these schemes, but get worn down or browbeaten into sending money just to try and get these people out of their lives.

Don't let it happen to you. Just hang up!

POINTS TO REMEMBER

PHONY LOTTERIES & SWEEPSTAKES

- A real lottery does not call you to say you have won.
- In a real lottery, you have to buy a ticket to win.
- A real lottery prize is free -- no fees or taxes are paid to the lottery.

EACH YEAR, many senior Texans lose millions of dollars to scam artists who operate by phone. These criminals tell victims that they have won a multi-million dollar lottery or sweepstakes prize.

They then ask consumers to wire thousands of dollars in up front "taxes" and handling fees before the prize can be sent. The prize never arrives. The money is lost forever. Some seniors have lost their life savings this way. Don't be next. Just hang up.



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Information on this and other topics is available on the Attorney General's Web site at www.oag.state.tx.us.