



CONSUMER ALERT

March 7, 2019
Contact: Sue Lindsay
303-835-5639

Sweepstakes Scams Targeting Seniors

Sweepstakes scams have been around for years and frequently target senior citizens. Don't fall for them. A new version of this old scam has surfaced recently in the 17th Judicial District.

A senior citizen from Thornton received a voicemail that she had won a \$750,000 sweepstakes. When she returned the call, a man told her he worked for the "Consumers Protection Agency" in Washington, D.C., and that he advocated for seniors. He said he would help her through the process of collecting her sweepstakes money.

The same day, she was contacted by another man who said he was with American Sweepstakes in Las Vegas. Both callers told her she needed to provide \$1200 to collect her prize money and instructed her to purchase a cashier's check in that amount and send it to an address in Pennsylvania. The woman did so but was contacted a few days later and told she needed to send a second cashier's check for \$5,200.

The woman was given a phone number supposedly for the American Sweepstakes office in Denver. Someone answered the phone the first time she called, claiming that the prize would be delivered. But when the woman called the number a second time, it was disconnected. The woman never received a penny of her promised \$750,000 sweepstakes.

Similar scam calls are being made in other states with similar results. Trusting victims are sending money to scammers for winnings that never are paid.

Lottery and sweepstakes scams are one of the most common consumer frauds operating today. According to the Federal Trade Commission, these scams were the third-most common type of fraud reported to the agency in 2017.

Never send money to anyone who promises you a windfall. They ask for your bank account or instruct you to send money in order to collect the prize money, claiming there's a fee, taxes, insurance or customs duties to pay. You lose money instead of winning it. Usually they ask for more money and your sweepstakes prize never comes.

Keep this in mind:

- In Colorado, it is illegal to charge any fee on any legitimate sweepstakes prize.
- All foreign lotteries are illegal in the United States.

- Taxes on winnings are never paid in advance.
- In valid sweepstakes contests, you must enter the contest before you can win. The same is true for lotteries. If you haven't entered a sweepstakes or purchased a lottery ticket, you can't win.
- Just hang up. The longer you stay on the phone with a scammer, the greater your risk of falling victim to the scam.
- Don't enter any sweepstakes contests. This keeps your name and phone number from getting on mailing lists that wind up in the hands of people running the scams.