

NEWS FROM SCDCA

South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS WARNS ABOUT GROWING SECRET SHOPPER SCAMS PLAGUING PALMETTO STATE

Columbia, SC.....The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs is responding to a flood of phone calls and e-mails regarding *secret shopper* scams. Consumers looking for legitimate work-at-home opportunities are asking questions. That's the good news. Asking questions is the one of the best methods for uncovering a phony deal. Unfortunately, consumers must carefully sift through a myriad of offers – an average of 55, according to experts – before they find one legitimate opportunity to bring in a little extra cash. And that's the bad news.

Consumers across the state have been receiving offers for good pay and free products in return for sending in customer satisfaction surveys for various retail locations. Unfortunately, employers for these secret shopper positions require money upfront and never make good on their end of the bargain. Consumers are often provided a check in the mail to help them with their initial purchases. The majority of the money, however, is requested back in the form of a money order or wire transfer – which can't be traced once the consumer realizes the original check was fake.

Consumers are sought out by these so-called "mystery shopping" organizations or companies. Consumers who may or may not be looking for work are likely to be intrigued with the offer when it appears in their mailbox. Letters even state a consumer has been pre-approved prior to any

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Our mission is to protect consumers from inequities in the marketplace through advocacy, mediation, enforcement and education.

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communication from the consumer, which only furthers many consumers' desire to respond quickly.

The Department strongly advises consumers to keep the following tips in mind regarding secret or mystery shopping opportunities:

- Legitimate companies will not solicit you. You should solicit them.
- Legitimate companies will not pay you upfront. You must pay a membership fee.
- Legitimate companies will not pre-approve you. You must qualify on your own.
- Legitimate companies will not operate through wire transfers or money orders. These are virtually untraceable forms of exchanging funds.

The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs continues to educate and warn consumers about this scam and others penetrating the state. Investigations regarding national and international crimes such as these are handled primarily by federal agencies. The Department encourages consumers to report suspected cases of secret shopping scams to the Federal Trade Commission at 877.382.4357.

For more information on secret shopper scams or other consumer issues, please contact the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs, Public Information Division at 803.734.4190, toll free in SC at 1.800.922.1594, or online at www.sccoconsumer.gov.

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