

SPOTLIGHT: FREE PRIZE, LOTTERY & SWEEPSTAKES SCAMS



You get a call, an email, a direct message on social media or a letter in the mail that says you've just won \$5,000! Or maybe even \$5 million, a fabulous diamond ring, or luxury vacation. Sounds too good to be true? More likely, it's a lottery and sweepstakes scam. Before you drop in a quick entry or follow instructions to claim a prize, here are a few things to know.

SIGNS OF A FREE PRIZE, LOTTERY & SWEEPSTAKES SCAM



Legitimate sweepstakes don't make you pay.

Legitimate sweepstakes don't make you pay a fee or buy something to enter or improve your chances of winning — that includes paying "taxes," "shipping and handling charges," or "processing fees" to get your prize. There's also no reason to give someone your checking account number or credit card number in response to a sweepstakes promotion.



You have to wire money or deposit a check they've sent.

You may be told to wire money to "insure" delivery of your winnings. Don't do it. Wiring money is like sending cash: once it's gone, you can't trace it or get it back. The same goes for cryptocurrency, sending a check or money order, or prepaid debit card/gift cards. If you get sent a check for deposit, they'll ask you to wire a portion of the money back. The check will turn out to be a fake and you'll owe the bank any money you withdrew.



They say they're from the government - or another official sounding organization.

They might say they're from an agency like the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and are informing you that you've won a federally supervised lottery or sweepstakes. Or they might use an official-sounding name like "the national consumer protection agency" or the non-existent "National Sweepstakes Bureau." No federal government agency or legitimate sweepstakes company will contact you to ask for money so you can claim a prize. Other scammers might pretend to be a company like Publishers Clearing House or Reader's Digest, which run legitimate sweepstakes.



Scammers say you've won a foreign lottery or that you can buy tickets for one.

Messages about a foreign lottery are almost certainly from a scammer — and it's a bad idea to respond. It's illegal for U.S. citizens to play a foreign lottery, so don't trust someone who asks you to break the law. Know that if you buy a foreign lottery ticket, expect a lot more offers for fake lotteries or scammy investment "opportunities."



Scammers pressuring you to "act now" to win.

Scammers want you to hurry up and pay or give them information. They tell you it's a limited time offer or you have to "act now" to claim your prize. They don't want you to have time to think so you don't realize it's a scam. If it was an actual winning, there wouldn't be a rush for you to claim the prize.

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT REAL CONTESTS & PRIZES

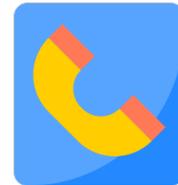
-  **Real sweepstakes are free and by chance.** You should not have to pay to enter a real sweepstakes or be required to buy something to enter. It's actually illegal for a sweepstakes company to give those who buy to get a better chance of winning.
-  **Respond to a contest promoter? Expect getting even more junk mail.** Answering a contest promoter may mean that they sell your information to advertisers. If you sign up for a contest or a drawing, you're likely to get more promotional mail, telemarketing calls, or spam.
-  **Contest promoters have to tell you certain things.** If they call you, the law says they have to tell you that entering is free, what the prizes are and their value, the odds of winning, and how you'd redeem a prize.
-  **Read the fine print.** Sweepstakes mailings must tell you certain things: 1) You don't have to pay to participate. 2) They can't claim you're a winner unless you've actually won a prize. 3) If a fake check is in their mailing, it has to clearly say it has no cash value.

REPORT!

If you received it by mail:

United States Postal Inspection Service

Criminal Investigations Service Center
1745 Stout Street, Ste. 900
Denver, CO 80299-3034
(877) 876-2455
www.postalinspectors.uspis.gov



If you received it
on the internet:

FBI - Internet Crime Complaint Center

FBI Columbia, SC Field Office
151 Westpark Boulevard
Columbia, SC 29210-3857
(803) 551-4200
<https://www.ic3.gov/Home/FileComplaint>



Did you give personal
or financial information
to a scammer?:

South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs

Identity Theft Unit
293 Greystone Boulevard, Ste. 400
PO Box 5757, Columbia, SC 29250
(844) TELL-DCA
<https://consumer.sc.gov/identity-theft-unit/scams>

For more information on filing a complaint or reporting a scam, visit www.consumer.sc.gov and "How Do I..."



South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs
293 Greystone Blvd., Ste. 400 • PO Box 5757 • Columbia, SC 29250
(800) 922-1594 • consumer.sc.gov

