



Beware of Sweepstakes Scams

From the Office of Minnesota Attorney General Lori Swanson

Most sweepstakes scams have a few things in common. They claim that the recipient has won, or is about to win, a large cash prize. And they try to get the recipient to pay money, often supposedly to claim the bogus prize.

Don't play along. The perpetrators of sweepstakes scams are fly-by-night operators who conceal their identity to avoid detection. Once your money is sent, it is usually lost for good. It can happen like this:

"Linda" received two mailings stating that cash prizes, each worth about \$1.5 million, were available to her. The first mailing was printed with an official-looking seal. The second mailing claimed "A PRIZE CHECK IS NOW AVAILABLE TO YOU." Both mailings asked her to pay a \$25 "report fee." The fine print indicated that the fee was for a listing of other sweepstakes she *could* enter. Linda knew that paying money would do nothing more than encourage the promoters to send her more bogus offers, so she threw away the mailings.

"William" received a mailing that claimed he had the chance to win over \$1 million. The mailing stated that all William needed to do was purchase a product from the catalog. William knew that no reputable sweepstakes company would require him to make a purchase like that, and he tossed the mailing in the trash.

Avoid Sweepstakes Scams

Don't be misled by sweepstakes scams. Remember the following:

1. You don't have to pay a fee to enter a legitimate sweepstakes. And buying something won't help you win. It is illegal for a sweepstakes company to give those who buy something a better chance of winning.
2. Don't be fooled by official-looking mailings. Some sweepstakes scams use names and seals that resemble those of legitimate organizations.
3. Read the entire solicitation carefully, including the fine print. Some solicitors bury important information—including that the recipient has not won anything or that the solicitor does not sponsor a sweepstakes at all—at the bottom of the page or on the back of the mailing.
4. Don't be rushed into sending money. Sweepstakes scams attempt to create a sense of urgency by suggesting that there is a limited time to respond or an immediate response is required.
5. Be skeptical. If in doubt, show the solicitation to a trusted family member or neighbor.

Steps You Can Take

Don't send money in response to these solicitations. Sweepstakes scammers sell and trade mailing lists. If you pay money to win a prize—or pay to receive information about potential prizes or other sweepstakes you *could* enter—you will just land on more mailing lists.

The Federal Deceptive Mail Prevention and Enforcement Act requires any promoter that mails sweepstakes solicitations to remove a person's name from its mailing lists within 60 days after receiving the person's request. This request must stay valid for five years. To remove your information from a promoter's mailing list, you must send a written request to the promoter asking it to do so. While this request may cut down on mail from more reputable sweepstakes companies, criminal scammers often just ignore such requests.

For more information, contact the following agencies:

U.S. Postal Inspection Service

Fraud Unit
222 South Riverside Plaza, Suite 1250
Chicago, IL 60606-6100
800-372-8347
www.postalinspectors.uspis.gov

Federal Trade Commission

Consumer Response Center
600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20580
Toll-free helpline: 877-382-4357
www.ftc.gov

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