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Consumer Advisory Bulletin-October 2003

Caution: Watch What You Sign**Entering contests and giveaways may expose you to unwanted calls or scams -- or even cancel your "Do Not Call" registration.**

Sweepstakes and prize entries have long been used to build calling lists for solicitors -- and sometimes to cheat consumers. Example: You sign up hoping to win a trip -- but the fine print on the back side of the entry card authorizes them to switch your long distance service to a different, expensive carrier. Moral of the story: watch what you sign.

Here are some of the bad things that can happen with free-prize sign-ups -- and some tips to help you avoid being cheated:

- **The latest variation of this ploy is aimed at canceling the effect of registering for the national "Do Not Call" list.** (The Do Not Call list prohibits most commercial telemarketing calls if you sign up.) In this case, a sweepstakes has touted a \$25,000 prize, but you are much more likely to win the "booby prize" - more telemarketing calls. Why? The entry form contains the line: "By completing this form, you agree that sponsors and cosponsors of this sweepstakes may telephone you, even if your number is found on a Do Not Call registry."

The national "Do Not Call" Registry permits telemarketers to contact you if they already have a business relationship with you, and some may claim a sweepstakes or prize entry meets that test. It's a special new reason to watch what you sign.

- **You may be inviting unwanted solicitations.** Even without deceptive fine print, prize entries are used to build consumer lists. You are unlikely to win a prize but very likely to receive more solicitations by mail, phone, or even at your door. Your name may be bought and sold by list brokers to honest businesses or to con-artists.
- **Your telephone long distance service could be "slammed"** (switched) to a different long distance company (which could be far more expensive than your chosen service.) Study both sides of any entry form to be sure there is no "fine print" that changes your phone service, signs you up for a "buyer's club," etc.
- **You may be asked for private financial information.** Don't give credit card or checking account information or your Soc. Sec. number. You may also want to keep private your date of birth, marital status, household income, and occupation.

Consider "taking a pass" on sweepstakes entries, and always read the fine print. If you have a complaint or question, contact the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division, Hoover Building, Des Moines, Iowa 50319. Phone 515-281-5926. Log on to the Attorney General's web site at www.iowaAttorneyGeneral.org

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