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Complaint
Other Complaint
Resources
News Releases &
Publications
Legal Resources
Jobs & Internships
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Consumer Advisory Bulletin- June 2005

Don't Gamble on Illegal Lottery Schemes

Lottery "hustlers" are stealing tens of millions of dollars from Americans, especially older citizens, with phony schemes for people to "strike it rich." Beware of mail or phone solicitations, unless it's the Iowa Lottery. Offers to enter national and international lotteries such as the Canadian or Australian lotteries are common but illegal in Iowa. There are only two legal ways to play a lottery: One is to buy tickets from the Iowa Lottery, and the other is to buy tickets in the state or country where a lottery is held. Unless it is for the Iowa Lottery, it is a violation of state and federal laws to sell lottery tickets through the mail or by telephone, or to mail letters and ads for lotteries across state lines.

Besides being illegal, lottery offers are usually empty promises that you will win big money. If you send your money off to these scam operators, you probably will never see any lottery tickets or winnings.

Follow these tips to avoid being cheated:

- Reject telephone or mail or Internet offers to buy a ticket or chance in another state or country's lottery.
These violate federal and state law.
- Never give your credit card number over the phone to purchase lottery tickets. If you give them your number once, additional unauthorized charges may show up on your credit card statement.
- Do not give out the checking account numbers listed along the bottom of your check. This is an increasingly common means for con-artists to obtain financial information and withdraw funds from your bank account.
- Be very skeptical of "urgent" solicitations that require an immediate response. It's a common tactic used in scams that gives you little time to check out the offer.
- Don't believe it if they say you are "Already a Winner!" The same notice often directs you to send money to a fraudulent operation.
- Remember, offers to sell you lottery tickets by mail or by phone are illegal, unless they are for the Iowa Lottery.

If you are notified by mail, please contact your local postal inspector.

To file a complaint, write to the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division, Hoover Building, Des Moines, IA 50319. The telephone number is 515-281-5926.

[Return to Consumer Advisories](#)