

Sweepstakes Scams Take Advantage of Poor Economy

Congratulations! You're the recipient of a sweepstakes scam. It starts off innocently enough. A person receives a congratulatory phone call or letter informing them that they've won a prize in a lottery or sweepstakes. The cash prize sounds great, especially during the economic downturn. The only hitch: before any winnings are delivered; the person must pay fees, taxes, or other charges from their own funds. Considering all the money they have just won, the amount requested seems small and reasonable compared to the winnings. In the end, the only prize the person will receive is an overdraft notice from their financial institution if they attempt to spend those winnings.

SNBT seeks to educate consumers on ways to avoid falling victim to the many scams that are surfacing. An educated, cautious consumer is the number one defense against scams such as these.

"I've seen this type of scam letter come through our community," said John Reinke, SNBT President. "Scams involving lotteries or sweepstakes are very common and tend to target consumers of all ages. Now more than ever, it is important to be cautious when receiving an offer that seems too good to be true." Protect yourself from sweepstakes scams with the following tips:

- 1.** Know who you're dealing with and confirm the company's name, address, and phone number through agencies like the Better Business Bureau.
- 2.** Don't give out your credit card or checking account number or write out a check unless you know who you're dealing with and what you'll be receiving.
- 3.** Resist high-pressure sales tactics and insist on time to think and discuss offers with trusted friends, family members, or financial advisors.
- 4.** Report any suspicious offers to your local police or financial institution. Either agency will offer help in determining the legitimacy of the offer.

Scammers are also contacting individuals claiming to hold stimulus checks in their name, or they may contact a person with an offer to be a mystery shopper or a similar job that sounds too good to be true. As tempting as these easy money opportunities might sound, you should always trust your better judgment. Contact Consumer Protection, the Better Business Bureau, or a local financial institution if an unsolicited offer is received. These organizations can advise you if the opportunity is real, or just a scam. Also, a person should never have to pay an employer for work; if money is asked for in advance of work, there is a very good chance that something is not right.