



Information Network Bulletin

November 2008



 brought to you by **Croydon Trading Standards** 

'STOP PRESS'

Beware! Lottery Scams

Every day, people throughout the UK open their post, receive a telephone call, turn on their computers or switch on their mobile phones to find they have unexpectedly won an exciting prize in a prize draw, lottery, sweepstake or other form of promotion. While some of these approaches are legitimate, others are a dishonest attempt to trap you into parting with your money. Many common scams take the form of prize draws or lotteries designed to trick the unwary. Scams are usually based outside the UK, although they may use UK Post Office or mail boxes.

How does it work?

Typical scams may:

- Offer access to a winning ticket or the prize in an overseas draw or lottery, or membership of a lottery syndicate, in return for an 'administration' or 'registration' fee
- Require a purchase of some kind to receive a 'prize'
- Suggest that there are government funds available to be claimed by individuals.

More often than not, there is no prize or reward on offer. Anything that is 'won' is usually sub-standard, overpriced or misleadingly described and worth much less than the requested fee.

To avoid becoming a scam lottery victim, remember these points:

- Ask yourself 'How could I win a lottery prize if I haven't bought a ticket?'
- Usually, if you win something you don't have to pay anything to receive your prize
- Once you respond to bogus promotions, your name and address is likely to be placed on other lists for similar scams
- If asked to use a premium rate telephone number, remember these can be very expensive and may be part of the scam
- Never reveal credit card or bank account details unless absolutely sure who you're dealing with. These details may be asked for as 'identification'.

Typical warning signs include:

- The approach, whether in writing, by phone or by email, is unsolicited
- There is a very short time in which to respond to claim your prize or winnings
- An invitation to send a 'processing' or 'administration' fee to obtain a prize or reward
- The need to use premium rate phone lines The source of the promotion is based overseas
- An invitation to send money out of the country, particularly to the Netherlands or Canada, by money transfer
- Prizes are expressed in foreign currency
- An invitation to provide credit card or bank account details.
- How to protect yourself: Remember that if you win something you shouldn't have to pay anything to receive your prize
- Do not enter sweepstake contests unless they are run by a company you know

El Gordo Lottery

The official operator of the Spanish El Gordo lottery, Loterías y Apuestas de Estado has issued a warning about fraudsters using the name El Gordo and forging documentation and bank forms to obtain money under false pretences.

Mailings and emails are being sent to UK consumers claiming they have won the Spanish lottery. In order to claim their 'prize', recipients are asked to provide their bank account details and told that 5-10 per cent of the winnings will be retained for costs. However the 'winners' are later contacted and asked for various fees in order to release their alleged prize, and they never receive a penny. Genuine Spanish lottery prizes are always free from taxes.

If you receive fraudulent El Gordo material you can help the investigations of Loterías y Apuestas de Estado by sending a copy to the following address:

Loterías y Apuestas del Estado
Legal Advice Service
C/ Guzmán el Bueno nº 137
28003 Madrid, Spain
Fax number: 00 34 91 533 51 36.

Is there anything I can do to check callers' identities?

Trading standards advice is not to buy goods or services from doorstep callers. However, if you are interested in the goods or services on offer you should check the identity of your caller and obtain a quote which you can then compare against those of other traders. Most reputable companies ensure that their representatives carry photo identification. Check that the person is the same as the one in the photo. ID cards or badges usually carry a phone number you can use to contact the company, but Trading Standards advice is to check the number in the phone book or yellow pages before you ring to confirm that it's genuine.

Utilities Password Scheme

By calling the appropriate numbers below you can register a password with your utility company that will be used whenever a genuine representative comes to visit you. **Some useful numbers are:**

Accuread (meter reading company)	0800 393 499
British Gas/Scottish Gas - Sales Representatives	0800 300 100
Meter Readers	0800 393 499
All Gas & Electricity Suppliers	08459 06 07 08
Energy Watch	
Typetalk	18001 0845 906 0708
BT	0800 321 999
Thames Water	0845 9200 800
Meter Plus Reading Services	0800 073 0030
Thames/Sutton and East Surrey Water	01737 764 444
npower	0800 073 3000
Powergen	0115 906 6000
Transco	0845 605 6677
Scottish & Southern Energy	0800 300 000
Virgin Home Energy	0800 085 0000
Siemens Energy Services Ltd	0115 906 6000
Trading Standards	0845 404 0506

Remember:

Always ask to see identification and check it carefully. If in doubt CLOSE your door and call your utility company to confirm. Genuine callers will not object to having their identity confirmed.

Remember if you have any doubts at all about the trader who calls on you; do not do business with him. If you receive a visit from someone you are suspicious about please tell us so that we can take appropriate action. You can notify trading standards by using the contact details above.

National Consumer Week

This year National Consumer Week will be held between **17-21 November 2008** and the theme is **“Be a Savvy Shopper this Christmas.”**

A key area of our work is Consumer Education. We believe that knowledge empowers consumers and that understanding the available choices open to them can help them make informed choices.

With this in mind, staff from Trading Standards will be hosting various road shows throughout Croydon to raise awareness of issues such as counterfeit goods and consumer rights and to give members of the public the chance to discuss any problems or concerns that they may have.

There will be a display stand, a range of helpful leaflets, and the staff will be taking the opportunity to offer advice and information, whether it's to do with understanding your rights when you're buying something, or highlighting issues such as doorstep sales, sales to the elderly and vulnerable groups and the problem of young people purchasing cigarettes and other age-controlled products.

Programme of events

- 17 November Whitgift Centre, Croydon
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- 19 November Central Library, Katharine Street, Croydon
- 20 November Tesco Superstore, 32 Brigstock Road, Thornton Heath
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The displays at the above venues will be from 10am to 4pm.

‘STOP PRESS’

Trading standards are warning of bogus traders who are cold calling homeowners in Croydon to discuss wall coatings that were applied some years previously. The rogues claim that the original wall coatings were substandard and that they are able to rectify the original works - for a fee. This fee then escalates and residents have been left out of pocket with no redress because the traders have provided false contact details.

DO NOT FALL FOR THIS SCAM

For details of a reputable trader contact www.trustmark.org.uk

