



Roy Cooper North Carolina Attorney General

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Don't trust that check in the mail, warns AG Cooper

Secret Shopper job scams and phony sweepstakes use fake checks to take your money

Raleigh: Don't fall for counterfeit check scams that use the promise of sweepstakes winnings or work as a secret shopper to try to steal your money, Attorney General Roy Cooper warned today.

"The promise of easy money can be tempting, especially during these tight times," Cooper said. "But instead of making you any money, these scammers will take your money."

Recently, at least 15 people per week have reported counterfeit check scams to Cooper's office. Consumers who spot a possible counterfeit check scam can call 1-877-5-NO-SCAM toll-free within North Carolina to report it to the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division.

One recent version of the scam starts with an advertisement in the newspapers or on the Internet, a telemarketing call, a letter or an email that promises you well-paying work as a secret or mystery shopper. People who respond are sent a real looking check, asked to deposit it and then wire the money back as a way to evaluate the wire service company. A few days later, the check turns out to be fake, meaning that victims have wired away hundreds or thousands of dollars of their own money.

A related scheme claims to offer work as a payment processor for an overseas company. Consumers who respond are sent money orders or checks to deposit and then asked to wire the funds back to the company. In exchange, they're promised 10 percent of the money. Once the funds have been wired, the money order or check turns out to be fraudulent.

"The latest versions of this scam take advantage of people who are looking for work or extra income during a slowing economy," Cooper said.

Consumers also report getting fake checks in response to items they've posted for sale in newspaper classified advertisements or on web sites such as eBay or Craig's List. Victims are sent a check for more than the asking price on their item for sale and asked to wire back the extra money. People also continue to get counterfeit checks that come with an announcement that they have won a lottery or sweepstakes prize. They are told to use the check to cover taxes and fees on their prize. Again, once the check has been deposited and the funds wired away, the check turns out to be counterfeit.

Counterfeit check scams are popular with international fraud rings. With recent advances in printing technology, crooks can make fake checks and money orders that look very convincing.

"If someone sends you a check and asks you to cash it and wire money back, don't do it, no matter how real it looks," Cooper said. "What seems like a windfall will only end up costing you money." ###