



Crime Watch

Avoiding Sweepstakes Scams

(NAPSA)—Every day, thousands of American consumers receive sweepstakes promotions—but not all sweepstakes offers are legitimate. It's important to be able to spot the scams.

Legitimate sweepstakes are marketing techniques that help marketers draw attention to their products by offering consumers a chance to win a prize or money with no payment required. If you have to pay to collect your prize, the sweepstakes is a scam.

"You should never have to pay to win a sweepstakes or collect a legitimate sweepstakes prize," warns Chief Postal Inspector Lee Heath. He says this means that you don't have to pay shipping and handling fees, taxes, legal fees, custom fees or buy a product to receive your prize. "Whenever you're required to make a payment before you can collect your prize, that is your clue that you are not dealing with a legitimate sweepstakes company," advises Patricia Kachura, Senior VP of The Direct Marketing Association.

Heath says to ask yourself the following questions to prevent being scammed:

- Do they ask for your credit card number, checking account number, bank account information or other personal account information? Heath says no legitimate prize company asks for this information to declare you a winner.
- Do they ask you to wire money or make a payment in an



You never have to pay to collect your sweepstakes prize if a sweepstakes is legitimate.

urgent manner? Do you feel pressure to make a payment within a given time deadline to collect your prize? If so, Heath says to take a step back and evaluate the sweepstakes. Contact your postal inspector to verify that you are dealing with a legitimate sweepstakes.

- Does the advertising copy clearly state that no purchase is necessary to win and a purchase will not increase your chances of winning? Heath says you never have to pay to play or collect your prize when the sweepstakes is legitimate.

To learn more on how you can prevent being scammed, visit www.usps.com/postalinspectors and/or www.dmaconsumers.org/sweepstakeshelp.html.