

Consumer Corner

Tips On Protecting Yourself From Check Scams

(NAPSA)—No one can really afford to lose money—ever. But that's exactly what will happen if you fall for a fake check scam.

Here's how it works: Someone sends you a genuine-looking check and asks you to wire a portion of the money somewhere—for instance, to pay taxes on a sweepstakes you supposedly won.

You deposit the check, withdraw the money and wire it as instructed. Then you learn that the check is counterfeit. Now the crook has the money and you owe it back to your bank or credit union. The average loss is \$3,000 to \$4,000.

If you think you can't be fooled, think again. Fake check scams take many forms. Sometimes people are told that they have been selected for a "grant" from the government or a foundation. Another popular variation of the scam involves earning money as a "mystery shopper" or an "account manager" for a company.

People selling items online are also targeted. Susan Grant, director of Consumer Protection at the nonprofit Consumer Federation of America (CFA), cautioned that people who are experiencing financial problems are especially vulnerable to promises of "sudden riches" or easy ways to make money.

According to a survey conducted for CFA, a majority of



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adults in the U.S. incorrectly believe that when they deposit a check, their bank or credit union confirms that it's good before allowing them to withdraw the money. "They can't tell that these checks are phony," said Ms. Grant. "They trust their customers to know the sources of the checks they deposit. If the checks bounce, the customers will be held responsible." Consumers are also liable if they cash fake checks at check cashing services or stores.

You can learn more at www.fakechecks.org. There, you can take a quiz, get answers to frequently asked questions, watch videos and send an ecard to warn others about these scams.

Remember, there is no legitimate reason why anyone who wants to give you money would ever ask you to send money anywhere in return.