



July is 'Scams Awareness' month. This is a joint campaign between the Citizens Advice Bureau & Trading Standards. Essex Police welcome the opportunity to support them. This week we address 'postal scams'. Often these letters carry these titles;

Important Document / Clairvoyant Friend/ Cheque to Dispatch/ Payment Required/ Act Now/ Dear Winner

Nearly half of people in the UK have been targeted by a scam. One of the ways that scammers commonly contact people is through the post. As the techniques that scammers use get more sophisticated, it can be difficult to spot the difference between scam mail, junk mail and offers from legitimate companies.

You can help protect yourself from postal scams by contacting the Mailing Preference Service (MPS) to have your name taken off mailing lists in the UK. This won't cover mail that is unaddressed or from overseas but will help. The MPS is free. Visit www.mpsonline or call 0845 703 4599.

Put a 'no junk mail' sign on your door

If you have received or are receiving something that looks like scam mail, don't respond to it, talk about it to someone you trust such as a friend, family member, Trading Standards or Citizens Advice bureau.

Most postal scams want your money. Letters may claim;

You have won a lottery, sweepstake or competition. To claim the prize you have to pay an administration fee. You pay the fee & either get back nothing or get something worth less than the fee you've paid.

Money you have won is being held in a holding company... BUT YOU HAVE TO SEND MONEY to release it.

Somebody has left you an inheritance... BUT YOU HAVE TO SEND MONEY to find out who.

A clairvoyant can stop bad luck or direct good luck towards you... BUT YOU HAVE TO SEND MONEY

Debt Recovery Agencies: threatening court action if a BOGUS overdue utility bill isn't paid within 7 days.

Religious Scam: Criminals use religion as a way of deceiving victims, often claiming they are going to pray at Lourdes.

Charity Scam: Criminals send out 'begging' letters from fictitious charities. They often use distressing photos in an attempt to pull at the heart strings of caring people.

In 2008 a survey conducted by Help the Aged and Barclays revealed that 7 out of 10 older people in Britain - more than 6.6m people – are targeted by scams every month. 22,000 victims replied to one scam mail shot and sent £500,000 in one day.

Remember

- If it sounds too good to be true it probably is
- If you haven't bought a ticket – you can't win it
- You shouldn't have to pay anything to get a prize
- Contacted out of the blue? – be suspicious.
- Never send money to someone you have never met.

The public should report most fraud offences direct to Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040 or online at www.actionfraud.police.uk.

You can report any postal scam through their website or by phone.
Action Fraud

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