

Tips About Cross Border Fraud

With telephone rates going down and the increasing use of the Internet, it's easier to keep in touch from one country to another. Unfortunately, crooks can take advantage of this to reach across borders and steal your money.

- **Cross-border fraud is on the rise.** The most common scams involve ways to win money through sweepstakes or lotteries, borrow money, get big savings on travel and other products or services, shield money from taxes through offshore accounts, protect your money by buying unnecessary credit card loss protection, make lots of money working at home, or get millions for transferring a fortune in another country into your bank account for safekeeping. None of these promises are true.
- **Fake check scams also often involve foreign crooks.** Scammers offer to pay you for something you advertised for sale or work you will do for them, and send a check for too much, or from someone else who supposedly owes them money, with instructions to deposit it and wire them the difference between the amount of the check and what you're owed. But the check is a fake and when it eventually bounces, you'll owe your bank the money you withdrew.
- **It may be hard to tell that you're dealing with someone in another country.** Sometimes crooks use addresses in the U.S. to disguise their locations and have the mail forwarded to them. On the Internet, it's impossible to be sure where someone is physically located. And phone numbers that look like domestic long-distance because they have the same number of digits may actually be in Canada or the Caribbean. If you're not sure whether a phone number is foreign or domestic, dial 00 and ask your long-distance operator before calling it.
- **Con artists may pose as officials from other countries.** In some sweepstakes scams, they pretend to be customs officials. Invitations to play foreign lotteries may seem to be from the governments of those countries when they're not. Many of the requests to safeguard foreign money in U.S. bank accounts come from people pretending to be current or former government officials. The supposed connection with government agencies helps make potential victims believe that the solicitations are legitimate.
- **Giving your credit card or bank account numbers to strangers is dangerous.** Crooks will use that information to make unauthorized charges or debits to your accounts, in some cases repeatedly. You won't find out until you get your next statement.
- **Foreign crooks often want the money wired to them.** That makes it quicker for them to get it and harder to trace.
- **It's harder to recover money from foreign crooks.** Because of the differences in legal systems, the difficulties of conducting investigations in other countries, and the expense and other complications involved in pursuing cross-border fraud, chances of getting your money back are very, very slim.
- **The bottom line is, be cautious.** As the marketplace becomes more global, consumer choices increase, and that's a good thing. But when someone you don't know makes you an offer, whether they're in a foreign company or in the United States, be cautious and check it out before responding. Get advice from the National Fraud Information Center, 800-876-7060, www.fraud.org.