



Guard Your Money

FROM THE OFFICE OF STATE TREASURER TED WHEELER

Common Scams to Watch Out For

Not every good offer is a scam. It's possible that an offer or deal similar to one of these scams is genuine... but remember: It's always a good idea to do your research and make a careful, educated decision before handing over any money, personal information, or your signature.

And keep in mind that not all of these situations are illegal. But just because something is legal, that doesn't mean it's a fair deal to you!

Mortgage-Related Scams

In this economy, there are plenty of mortgage-related offers out there. Some are valid offers, some are simply bad deals, and some are actually illegal. It's important to research your options as well as the company making you an offer before doing business. Click on the link below to find out who's a U.S. Housing and Urban Development-approved counselor!

Online Payday Lending Scams

Beware of online payday lending websites. Many consumers have signed up for what they thought would be a two-week loan only to find out that their bank accounts are quickly drained towards hidden "finance fees."

"Free" Trial Offers that Aren't

Often, you will be offered a free trial version of something before you make your actual purchase. Many times, this is a safe practice: receiving a tiny cube of cheese at the supermarket, for example, does not require your bank account or credit card information. Some offers, however, require a complicated cancellation process to be followed or you may find yourself making an automatic monthly payment. Be wary of any "free" offer that asks for your personal or banking information. Pay attention to your financial statements and always inform your bank or credit union about any charges that you didn't authorize.

How to Identify a Genuine Census Worker

Real U.S. Census workers will not ask for your Social Security Number or information about your debt or finances. Sometimes, a scammer will pose as a census worker either via e-mail, regular mail, or in person. The Census is an important process, but don't be afraid to ask to see identification.

General Personal Information Scams

The scam works like this: You will get a phone call, letter, or e-mail with some surprising or terrible news that can supposedly be averted if and only if you send your personal information in right now! This may be an e-mail suggesting that you're signed up for jury duty and they need your Social Security Number to schedule you or you will be fined. Be wary in any situation in which someone calls you asking for personal information. Stay calm. If you need to, tell the other person that you need to verify their information and you'll call their office back.

Refund Anticipation Loans

Would you pay for the privilege of borrowing your own money? You may, if you need it right away. But keep in mind that you're paying for money that you'll otherwise soon get anyway. If you weigh your options and do decide to consider a refund anticipation loan, make sure that all of your actual and possible costs are spelled out in writing, such as your interest rate, any fees you will be charged, and who is responsible if your refund is less than what you thought it would be.

Shoddy Tax Preparation

If you have your taxes prepared for you, make sure that your tax preparer is certified. You can search to see if a tax preparer is licensed by going online to: <http://www.oregon.gov/OTPB/>. Some preparers will promise huge refunds (and rig your return to make it look that way) and convince you that their fee is less than the return... but when the errors are resolved, YOU still end up owing the full amount!

"Who's Who" Books or Registries

It's an honor to be recognized among your peers in any walk of life. However, sometimes you'll receive an offer from someone who is compiling a "Who's Who" directory or registry and tell you that the inclusion fee is hundreds of dollars or more. Be sure that you're getting your money's worth -- sometimes, the "networking" benefits of being included in such a directory is that your information is sold to marketers!

"Work From Home Online" Offers

There are some good, honest ways to make money by providing services through your computer. But when a company or individual attempts to sell you a "kit" that you're meant to use to get started... be cautious. Many of these kits contain services that are otherwise available for free, and you may end up paying a monthly charge on your credit card which -- though technically legal -- is a bad deal.

Drained Gift Cards

You know that when you have a gift card to a particular store, you can often use that card to purchase items online. Scammers know this too, and sometimes they'll write down numbers of unsold cards, then continue checking the balance online until it becomes activated, at which point they use the number of the card online. When you buy a gift card, ask what kinds of safeguards are built into it. Some stores only allow balance-checks in person. Many cards now have a verification

code written under a scratch-off covering on the reverse. Never buy a card that has had its scratch-off already scratched off!

Sham Charities

Make sure that when you give to charity, you're giving to a properly-registered charity. This not only helps ensure that your money is going to a good cause, but also that you're free to deduct the donation from your taxable income. Some "charities" may give little or no money to the cause they're claiming to support. Click the link below to find out how to check up on charities.

Bank Account Verification

A bank (either yours or not) will call or text you claiming that your account requires verification. They may claim that it has been compromised or that they need to make a deposit. No legitimate bank will call you and ask for your account information. This scam often pretends to be from Bank of the Cascades and text messages are especially sent to 541 area code numbers.

"Free" Puppies (or anything else of value that seems free)

Sometimes the ad offers a free puppy. Or, maybe a pure bred dog needs a new home. The scam works like this: although the dogs are "free," the seller will ask to be wired money in order to safely ship the dogs. Some victims have even gone to the airport to pick up their new pet only to discover there is no dog and they've been scammed. This scam may even show up as ad an run in a reputable newspaper.

"Free" Money Transfer Fees

Oftentimes people are promised "free" money from somewhere. This can be a government grant, proceeds from a lottery, or even a gift for helping someone you've never met make financial arrangements. Don't be taken in by a scam that asks you to put money upfront to get a larger amount of money later. Remember: If you are owed money, you can always ask for contact information so that you can research the situation properly and call back.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

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