



# Avoid Foreign Lotteries

From the Office of Minnesota Attorney General Lori Swanson

The Minnesota Attorney General warns consumers to be on alert for telephone calls, mailings, faxes, or e-mails claiming that a consumer has won a foreign lottery or contest. Minnesotans are being targeted by fraudulent operators pretending to represent foreign lotteries in Canada, Australia, Spain, and other countries. **DO NOT FALL FOR THIS SCAM!** Foreign lotteries are *always* illegal, and nobody ever wins. On the national level, the United States Postal Inspection Service indicates that foreign lottery scams cost Americans over \$120 million per year! Don't let this happen to you!

**How the Scam Works.** A consumer typically receives a telephone call, mailing, fax, or e-mail indicating that he/she has won a prize in a foreign lottery or contest. In some cases, the correspondence may claim to involve a contest within the United States, but upon further review the correspondence (and the scam artist) originate from a foreign country. In yet another version of the scam, the correspondence may indicate that a foreign government is distributing money to American consumers who may have been harmed by illegal telemarketing activities by a foreign firm. Although there are many versions of this scam in operation, they all bear the same trait: ***a request that the “winner” send money to receive their prize.*** The fraudulent operator typically asks the “winner” to send money to cover fees for processing, legal operations, foreign customs, taxes, etc. Additionally, the scam artist may ask the target to send a personal check, money order, wire transfer, or to disclose personal banking information, such as check routing information or a credit card number. The fraudulent operator typically assures consumers that they will receive their prize after the lottery has received its payment.

For example, a consumer may receive a letter claiming he/she is the winner of a Spanish lottery and urging them to contact an “official” immediately at a number provided on the mailing. Upon contacting the individual, the consumer is asked to send a processing fee to a foreign address and await their prize. In some cases, the consumer may even receive additional correspondence

from the scam artist, requesting additional funds for another “fee.” Once the consumer’s money is gone, however, they will never hear from the fraudulent operator again. In another version of the scam, a consumer may be contacted by telemarketers claiming that he/she won a lottery drawing in Canada, and that the consumer will receive hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars if he/she sends several thousand dollars to cover the taxes on the prize reward. Once the consumer has sent the money, contact with the operators is cut off.

## Tips to Avoid Foreign Lotteries

- 1) Beware of solicitations asking you to send a check, wire transfer, or other payment to another country. Once the payment has left the country, United States law enforcement officials may have difficulty pursuing the funds.
- 2) Do not disclose your credit card number, check routing information, or other banking information to unknown telemarketers or those claiming to represent foreign lottery officials. Fraudulent operators can use this information to commit identity theft and access your accounts at will.
- 3) Do not believe claims that you need to pay to “collect your winnings.” Although lottery winnings may be subject to taxes, legitimate lottery operations simply deduct a portion of the winnings in lieu of the tax payment.
- 4) If it sounds too good to be true, it is! Do not let a desire to “strike-it-rich quick” cloud your better judgment.

**Federal Law.** Consumers should not enter any foreign lottery or sweepstakes asking for money in return for winnings or chances. Federal law prohibits the use of mail to sell or buy lottery materials, including tickets, letters or circulars concerning a lottery, chances or shares in a lottery, or payments to purchase such tickets, chances, or shares.

Both the Federal Trade Commission (“FTC”) and the United States Postal Inspection Service investigate fraudulent lottery solicitations. To report a fraudulent lottery scam, consumers may wish to contact the FTC and the Postal Inspector as follows:

Federal Trade Commission  
Consumer Response Center  
600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20580  
1-877-382-4357  
[www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov)

U.S. Postal Inspection Service  
PO Box 64558  
St. Paul, MN 55164-0558  
(651) 293-3200  
[www.usps.com/postalinspectors](http://www.usps.com/postalinspectors)

For more information on avoiding foreign lotteries, or other consumer information, contact the Minnesota Attorney General’s Office as follows:

**Office of Minnesota Attorney General**  
**Lori Swanson**  
1400 Bremer Tower  
445 Minnesota Street  
St. Paul, MN 55101  
(651) 296-3353 or 1-800-657-3787  
TTY: (651) 297-7206 or 1-800-366-4812  
[www.ag.state.mn.us](http://www.ag.state.mn.us)

**\*MILLIONAIRE LOTTO SWEEPSTAKES\***

XXXX  
XXXX  
XXXX

Telephone: (XXX) XXX-XXXX

Ref: # XXXX-XXXXXX/XX/XXX

Claim: # XXXXXX-XX

Dear XXXX

**SUBJECT: AWARD CLAIM FINAL NOTIFICATION**

We are pleased to inform you that you are one of the lucky declared winners of the **MILLIONAIRE LOTTO SWEEPSTAKES** held on July 15, 2007 in the 2nd Category.

You are therefore entitled to the sum of \$250,000.00 US Dollars. This is from a total prized money of \$2.5 Million US Dollars that was shared and presented among the other ten declared winners. Please note that all the participants were selected through a random computer ballot system drawn from over 450,000 names. Many unsuccessful attempts to contact you regarding these winnings have been made.

In accordance with our disbursement policy, your prize award money has been forwarded to our clearing/disbursement institution with instructions to release your funds to you after all clearance has been made. Enclosed is a check of **\$4,855** deducted from your winnings, to enable you pay the applicable **TAXES** on your big winnings. You are also advised to keep your claim number confidential to avoid duplication or loss of claim.

The tax amount is **\$2,950.00** to be paid by wiring the funds to the tax agent. You will receive your tax information from your assigned Claim Agent **Mr. XXXX XXXXXXXX**.

Once again, your claim number is **XXXXXX-XX** and has been assigned to our North American Claim Affiliate. To expedite the processing of your funds, you must contact your claim agent immediately below.

**Mr. XXXX XXXXXXXX**  
Telephone: (XXX) XXX-XXXX

To claim your funds, please contact the institution within 5 business days.  
Congratulations.  
Yours Truly,

Mrs. XXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXX  
Promotion Manager

