



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

ICE RETURNS \$8,200 TO SCAM VICTIM FROM LINCOLN *Special agent warns of telemarketing scams*

LINCOLN, Neb.—Special agents with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Omaha today returned \$8,200 to a Lincoln man who had been victimized by telemarketing con artists operating from Canada.

The \$8,200 check presentation today is the result of a joint investigation that included the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, ICE, FBI and the U.S. Postal Inspectors. Project COLT, as it's called, is a multi-agency joint U.S.-Canada initiative targeting telemarketing fraud.

Michael Wardy, acting resident agent-in-charge for the ICE office in Omaha, issued a warning that Nebraska residents should be vigilant about such scams, which have already bilked people – especially senior citizens – in the United States out of tens of millions of dollars.

“There’s no such thing as free money,” said Wardy. “Don’t get fooled by con artists that pass themselves off as trustworthy, but their endgame is to suck every penny they can out of their victims. Before sending a single cent, make the toll-free call to Project COLT’s hotline at 888-495-8501.”

Wardy said that telemarketing scams are prevalent and take on various forms. In March, ICE agents in the Twin Cities, Minn. reported the emergence of a telemarketing scam in which people from across the United States received calls from someone claiming to be a “customs agent” in Pembina, N.D., located along the U.S.-Canada border. The caller claimed that the intended victim had won the Canadian lottery and that a check for a large dollar amount was being held at the border. The con artist would then request a “processing fee” or “customs duty” be wired or mailed before the check could be released.

This scam was particularly sophisticated in that intended victims were given a call-back telephone number in Fargo, N.D., adding credibility to the ruse. In reality, calls made to the Fargo number were electronically routed to the con artists in Canada.

Those who run telemarketing schemes are highly skilled, and even the skeptical can fall victim. In August 2003, ICE Special Agent-in-Charge Robert Gattison in Tucson returned \$14,620 to a retired Army brigadier general. The 86-year-old Tucson resident had been victimized in a version of the long-running telemarketing scam. A law enforcement investigation resulted in the recovery of the general's money.

“The sad truth is that most people simply lose their money,” said Wardy. “ICE will do everything it can to stop this criminal enterprise, but the first line of defense is for people to grip their wallets and purses tightly whenever someone calls asking for money.”

Telemarketing fraud, which primarily targets elderly victims in the United States, has resulted in the loss of tens of millions of dollars by people who are least able to recover from financial loss. Victims often lose their entire life savings. Fraudulent telemarketers represent themselves to victims as lawyers, government officials, police officers, accountants or lottery company officials. The victims are told that they will receive a sum of money varying from thousands to millions of dollars in lottery winnings.

Since 1998, the Project COLT joint initiative has included agents from the following organizations: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), FBI, U.S. Postal Inspectors, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Surete du Quebec (SQ), and Montreal Urban Community Police (MUC). The focus of Project COLT is to identify, disrupt, and dismantle telemarketing fraud operations. Project COLT is a unit consisting of law enforcement officers who intercept funds (usually bank drafts and cashiers' checks), so they can be recovered and ultimately returned to victims. Project COLT Officers also work to prevent further victimization both through public education and the prosecution of those who commit the fraud.

Project COLT members also have formed partnerships with Canada Customs and Revenue, Canada Post Corporation, Federal Express, Purolator, United Parcel Service, DHL and other companies to assist with fund interception and return.

Project COLT Web Site: http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/qc/pro_ser/delits_e.htm

Fact Sheet: [Project COLT: A Joint United States-Canada Telemarketing Fraud Task Force](#)

Fact Sheet: [Project COLT's Top 10 telemarketing scams](#)

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security