

# FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Office of Consumer and Business Education

## Consumers Can Tell It to the FTC – Toll-Free

A product you bought through an Internet auction months ago still hasn't been delivered. A newspaper ad offers "Guaranteed Loans," but requires a fee up front. A fabulous prize offer comes in the mail, but requires a fee before you can claim it. A scholarship service promises easy money for college — as long as you send in a check.

Sound familiar?

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) says even wary and sophisticated consumers face a barrage of fraudulent offers every day. The FTC ought to know: last year, the agency logged in over 380,000 complaints from consumers.

The FTC has made it easy for consumers to report a fraud to the law enforcement agency through a toll-free Consumer Help Line, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357). The line is staffed by counselors from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., Eastern time, Monday through Friday.

According to Howard Beales, Director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection, the toll-free number offers consumers a two-fer. It makes the agency more accessible to consumers who want to report a fraud, and it makes their valuable complaint data available to law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and Canada. "That's important because fraud has moved beyond the front porch to cyberspace and all points in between," Beales said.

Consumer fraud complaints to the FTC are entered into a database that is available to nearly 630 law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and Canada. They use it to spot fraudulent activity, trends and wrong-doers — and stop them.

"Through the toll-free Help Line, consumers can get helpful information on the spot," Beales said. "Obviously, the FTC can't intervene in individual disputes, but consumer complaint information is crucial to the enforcement of consumer protection laws. The information that consumers get on a particular issue also lessens the likelihood that they'll be scammed again. Education is a powerful consumer protection."

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, visit [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov) or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

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| <b>FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION</b> | <b>FOR THE CONSUMER</b>                             |
| <b>1-877-FTC-HELP</b>           | <b><a href="http://www.ftc.gov">www.ftc.gov</a></b> |

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