

# FTC Consumer Alert

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

*Produced in cooperation with the U.S. Customs Service*

## Custom-ized Cons Calling

It's the latest "lucky day" con, a new twist on those age-old lottery and sweepstakes scams. And true to tradition, there's only one winner — the con artist, not the consumer.

The scam goes something like this:

*"Mrs. Smith, this is Agent Jones with the U.S. Customs Service. I'm calling because we're holding a package for you at the Canadian border and we need to examine the contents before we can forward it to you. The package contains a check in your name for several thousand dollars from a contest or sweepstakes. We can forward this to you immediately, but first you need to pay the taxes and fees that are owed on this prize. You can wire the fees to us at ..."*

Of course, there is no prize. The tip-off is that the U.S. Customs Service never calls consumers about packages at the Canadian border. But by claiming to be a government official, the caller makes you think the deal is real.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the U.S. Customs Service say these deals are duds and illegal ones at that. Here's how to respond should you get a call from a "custom-ized con."

- Hang up if you're asked to pay for a prize. Free is free.
- Tell callers if you don't want to hear from them again. If they call you back, they're breaking the law. It's also illegal for telemarketers to lie about the nature of a prize in a prize-promotion scheme.
- Don't send money — cash, check or money order — by courier, overnight delivery or wire to anyone who insists on immediate payment.
- Keep information about your bank accounts and credit cards to yourself — including the numbers, unless you know who you're dealing with.
- Hang up if a telemarketer calls you before 8 a.m. or after 9 p.m. That's a tip-off to a rip-off.
- Report the call to the FTC and the U.S. Customs Service.

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, call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357), or use the online complaint form. 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.

The U.S. Customs Service tracks down criminals who perpetrate telemarketing fraud. These types of financial crimes are transnational in nature and cross many borders. But when they cross the borders of the United States, whether by mail, wire or phone, U.S. Customs has investigative jurisdiction.

<b>FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION</b>	<b>FOR THE CONSUMER</b>
<b>1-877-FTC-HELP</b>	<b>www.ftc.gov</b>

April 2002