

7 Ways to Avoid Scams

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It's exciting to learn that you've won the grand prize in a sweepstakes. But if you don't take a moment to step back and examine the contest, you may become a victim of sweepstakes scam.

Before you rush to claim your next prize, take a moment to review the following tips to help keep safe from sweepstake scams:

1. **Never pay to play.** It's illegal for a company to require a purchase or fee in order to win or claim a prize.
2. **Don't give the company money for taxes on your prize.** When you win, your taxes will be deducted directly from your prize or you'll pay them directly to the U.S. government.
3. **Never provide personal account information.** No legitimate sweepstakes company will ask for your credit card and bank account numbers. However, your social security number may be required for tax reporting purposes if you have won---don't provide that information unless you've verified that you entered the contest and a legitimate company is operating the sweepstakes.
4. **Watch for imposters.** Con artists may use company names that are identical or nearly identical to legitimate sweepstakes companies. If you receive a phone call from someone claiming to be from a sweepstakes company, tell them you will call back for information on how to claim your prize. This way you can call the phone number you know is associated with the actual organization.
5. **Question offers for an "advance" on your winnings.** This can be a scam to get money from your savings or checking account. The con sends you a check for part of your "winnings", tells you to deposit it and wire payment to them for taxes, bonding, etc. After you send the wire, the check bounces and your money is gone.
6. **Get all of the details in writing.** Ask for information on how the contest works, the odds of winning, an explanation of prizes, the fact that no purchase is necessary, etc.
7. **Examine your mail.** Even if it looks official, it could be a fake. One clue that you haven't actually won is if the letter was sent at a bulk mail rate. That means hundreds or even thousands of others are receiving the exact same letter in the mail.

Sincerely,

BURT
Financial
Center Credit Union