



POSTAL NEWS

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Postal Service Celebrates National Consumer Protection Week *Postal Officials Warn Consumers About "Fake Checks," Identity Theft*

WASHINGTON, DC — Postal Service executives are marking National Consumer Protection Week by warning consumers against fake check scams and providing tips to prevent identity theft.

National Consumer Protection Week (NCPW), set for March 2-8, is a week of activities sponsored primarily by the Federal Trade Commission to draw attention to fake check scams and other threats to consumers. The Postal Service and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service are playing an important role by drawing attention to the continuing consumer problem of fraudulent checks and money orders and building on a national outreach effort to protect against identity theft.

Delores J. Killete, vice president and consumer advocate for the Postal Service, and Alexander Lazaroff, chief postal inspector of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, are leading the Postal Service effort this week to provide consumers with valuable information about protecting their assets from fraudulent schemes and tips to keep their personal information safe.

Last month, the Postal Service delivered an important message from Postmaster General John Potter to every household in America, advising Americans to protect against identity theft. A recent Federal Trade Commission survey on identity theft determined that only 2 percent of all victims reported that the theft was connected to the mail.

The Postal Service teamed up with the FTC to provide tips and tools to help Americans protect their identities and information on actions they can take if they become victims of identity theft. The FTC brochure, "Deter. Detect. Defend. Fighting Back Against Identity Theft," was included in the mailing.

Postal Service representatives across the country also are educating consumers by distributing DVDs and brochures warning against fraudulent financial schemes, as well as by hosting information sessions and events.

"In today's economy it is more important than ever that we partner with our customers to give them tools to avoid losing their hard-earned money to fake check scams," Killete said.

A global fraud crackdown began in January 2007. Since then, postal inspectors and their global law enforcement partners have seized more than 600,000 fake checks with a value of about \$2.5 billion. In October 2007, the Postal Inspection Service partnered with a coalition of 20 businesses, financial entities and consumer advocacy groups to launch the www.FakeChecks.org website to educate consumers about those and other scams.

"Postal inspectors are still hearing stories from Americans approached over the Internet or through the mail by people who want them to believe it's okay to deposit a check and wire all or part of the money away," said Lazaroff. "We are using National Consumer Protection Week to once again warn consumers that, if

they fall for a fake check scam, they will not get that money back.”

Postal officials say consumers are still being targeted for fake check scams but can take steps to protect their assets. The message is clear: The best way for consumers to protect themselves is to learn how to avoid such scams as foreign business offers, sudden riches, work-at-home schemes; love losses; overpayments and rental schemes.

Tips to avoid becoming a fraud victim:

- Use common sense.
- Take your time when responding to offers.
- Educate yourself about fraud.
- Know whom you are dealing with.
- Protect your personal information.
- Be skeptical of any offer that sounds too good to be true.

“The old adage still holds true: If someone offers you a deal that sounds too good to be true, it probably is,” Killelte said.

The *FakeChecks.org* website serves as the primary vehicle to learn about check fraud schemes so that visitors of the site don't become victims. A fraud complaint can be filed on the site as well. Remember, fake check scams are a fast-growing fraud that could ruin your financial investment and cost you thousands of dollars.

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About the U.S. Postal Service

An independent federal agency, the U.S. Postal Service is the only delivery service that visits every address in the nation – 146 million homes and businesses. It has 37,000 retail locations and relies on the sale of postage, products and services to pay for operating expenses, not tax dollars. The Postal Service has annual revenues of \$75 billion and delivers nearly half the world's mail.

About the U.S. Postal Inspection Service

The U.S. Postal Inspection Service is one of the oldest federal law enforcement agencies in the country. For more than 200 years, Postal Inspectors have protected the U.S. Postal Service, secured the nation's mail system and ensured public trust in the mail. To learn more, visit <http://postalinspectors.uspis.gov>.