

## TIPS TO PROTECT YOURSELF

**Protect your privacy** – Never give out personal information over the telephone, especially your Social Security number. Do not disclose financial information to anyone outside of a trusted circle of family members and advisors.

**Ask for identification** – Never let strangers into your home, and always check identification of any service person you have contacted before allowing them to enter your home. Report suspicious solicitations to the police.

**Limit the amount of cash you keep on hand** - Do not allow anyone to take you to withdraw money from your bank to pay for their services.

**Carefully review all contracts before you sign** - Also, review all bank and credit card statements, stock reports and investment prospectives. Double check sales receipts to make sure you were not over charged.

**Ask questions** - Never be afraid to consult a trusted friend, a financial advisor/ lawyer or family member for assistance, especially when making purchases of more than \$100 or signing contracts. Contact the Better Business Bureau and/or the New York Department of State's Division of Consumer Protection with any questions or concerns.

## IF YOU ARE THE VICTIM OF A SCAM

- Call your local police or sheriff's office to report the crime.
- Alert neighbors and community organizations to the presence of scam artists in your area.
- Contact the Division of Consumer Protection at [www.dos.ny.gov](http://www.dos.ny.gov), the Attorney General's Office at [www.ag.ny.gov](http://www.ag.ny.gov) and/or your local consumer protection agency so they can warn others and offer assistance.
- Keep a record of your financial losses in case there is a prosecution and restitution is ordered.



Division of  
Consumer Protection

*Advocating for and Empowering New York Consumers*

A Division of the New York Department of State

1-800-697-1220  
<https://dos.ny.gov>

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# AVOIDING SCAMS

a consumer guide



**WATCH FOR THE WARNING SIGNS**

**PREPARE YOURSELF BEFORE SOMEONE TAKES ADVANTAGE OF YOU AND YOUR MONEY**

**EMPOWER YOURSELF WITH INFORMATION**



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## PSYCHOLOGICAL WEAPONS OF FRAUD

*Fraud relies on the manipulation of your emotions and trust to get you to commit to a transaction.*

**Reciprocity:** Marketers often make you think that they are offering something special, compelling you to return the favor.

**Follow the Crowd:** Many solicitations display testimonials from people who have bought the product or paid for the service.

**The Scarcity Mentality:** Scammers emphasize the fact that the product is scarce, and thus, valuable. Often they will represent that if you don't invest quickly you will miss a great opportunity.

**Authority Figure:** Another technique employed in marketing is the use of authority. Thus, when telemarketers call your home raising money to support local police or firefighters, you are more inclined to donate.

**Familiarity:** A common approach is to build a trusting relationship with the customer quickly so they will purchase the product. Thus, the con-artist will pretend to have things in common with the you.

**Contrast:** The notion that you should buy a product if it has been reduced because then, in contrast to the regular price, the consumer is getting a good deal and saving money.

**Customizing the Pitch:** Scam artists usually customize their pitch to reflect the kind of person they are targeting. They try to find out as much as possible about you, and then select the right solicitation, set of tricks and/or psychological tactics to accomplish the crime.

## SWEEPSTAKES and LOTTERY SCAMS

### THE SCAM

A letter or a phone call tells you that you've won a big money prize. But you can't collect your prize until you pay a "tax" or buy a product.

### THE TRUTH

If you win the lottery or a sweepstakes, they pay you — you never pay them.

### REMEMBER

Watch out for mail that looks official but isn't. Foreign, cross-border lottery sales violate U.S. law. Sweepstakes issuers must provide odds of winning each prize; the quantity, estimated value and nature of prize; and schedule of payments.

## EMAIL TRAVEL SCAMS

### THE SCAM

A friend or family member sends you a desperate email from overseas. They've been mugged and are asking for your help so they can pay their bills and get a flight back home. The email is coming from someone you know and it sounds legit, but you didn't even know your friend or relative was on vacation.

### THE TRUTH

It is a scam artist posing as a family member or friend to swindle you out of your money.

### REMEMBER

Before you transfer money: VERIFY the person and their need. Make contact with the person at a phone number (don't use the email account) you know belongs to them, make sure they're okay, and tell them their email has been hacked.

## HOME IMPROVEMENT FRAUD

### THE SCAM

An unsolicited contractor claims that your home needs repair work for damage you never noticed. Common tactics involve work on your chimney, roof, or driveway. These contractors often offer special deals because they have material left over from another job.

### THE TRUTH

When you hire someone without checking their credentials, you could end up spending a lot of money for very poor quality work.

## WHEN WORKING WITH CONTRACTORS

Determine exactly what work you want done. Don't agree to work on the spot.

Shop for a contractor. Use a contractor that is recommended by a family member or close friend. Ask for, and review, references. If a license is required, ask the contractor to provide a copy.

Ensure that all promises be put in writing, including the project scope, costs, payment schedule and start and expected completion date. Review the contract carefully as you have three days to cancel the deal.

## DO NOT PAY THE FULL AMOUNT UPFRONT

Don't sign a certificate of completion until the work is completed to your satisfaction.

Be wary of contractors who offer high cost loans in combination with construction services.

Keep all paperwork.