



# Florida Consumer E-Newsletter

brought to you by the Division of Consumer Services

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services - Charles H. Bronson, Commissioner

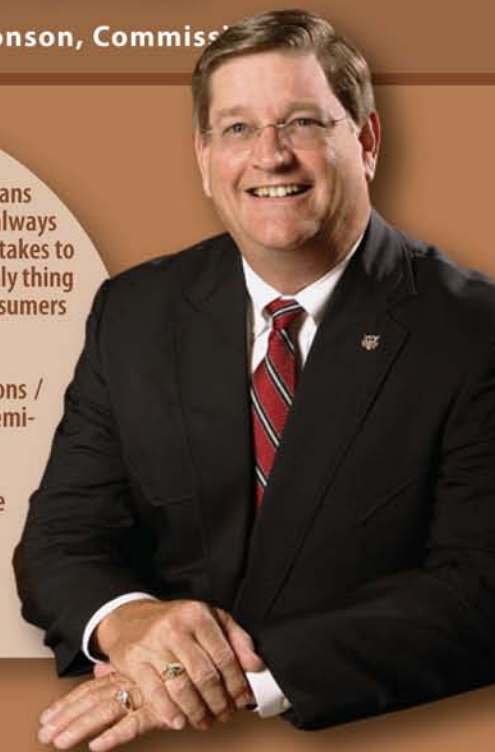
Dear Friends:

"YOU ARE A WINNER!" and similarly worded mailings are clever devices to induce an increasing number of Floridians to participate in sweepstakes, or "game promotions." While most game promotions are legitimate, there are always scammers trying to lure in potential victims for the purposes of fraud. Some con artists use the lure of a sweepstakes to convince consumers to send in money to claim a "prize" they've supposedly won. They tell consumers that the only thing that separates them from their "winnings" is a fee to cover the taxes or service charges. But as all too many consumers know, the winnings as described never materialize.

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is the regulatory authority for game promotions / sweepstakes in the State of Florida. Our goal is to educate citizens about game promotions and to assist in disseminating information about potential fraud.

Remember, we're here for you. Our Consumer Hotline, calling within Florida 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352), outside of Florida 850-488-2221 or en Español 1-800-FL-AYUDA (352-9832), will answer any consumer related questions you may have or direct you to the most appropriate resource for assistance. You can also visit us online at [www.800helpfla.com](http://www.800helpfla.com) for additional consumer information. Remember... consumer education is the best defense against fraud and deception.

Sincerely,



## Game Promotions

Florida Law defines a game promotion as a contest, game of chance, or gift enterprise, conducted in connection with the sale of consumer products or services in which the elements of chance and prize are present. However, bingo games, raffles and lotteries are NOT game promotions.

A game promotion offered in Florida which has prizes totaling more than \$5,000 must be filed with the Department seven days prior to the promotion's starting date. A security is required unless the operator conducted game promotions in Florida for at least five consecutive years and has had no civil, criminal or administrative actions instituted against. This protects citizens who participate by ensuring compensation if the game operator is unable to award prizes offered in the promotion.

The rules for the game promotion must be published in all advertising and be conspicuously posted. In addition, the operator must give, at no charge, a list of winners to those who request it. You can also obtain a list from us by calling 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352).

A violation of Florida Law by a game promoter can result in a civil penalty of up to \$1,000 per violation, an injunction, and, in some cases, if appropriate, referral for criminal prosecution.

### How do I tell if it's Fraud?

A game promotion is a marketing technique designed to induce you, the consumer, to purchase a product or service. There's a big difference between legitimate promotions and fraudulent ones. Prizes in legitimate contests are awarded solely by chance, and contestants don't have to pay a fee or buy something to enter or increase their odds of winning. In fraudulent schemes, however, "winners" almost always have to dip into their pockets to enter a contest or collect their "prize." The following tips are suggested to help you determine if a promotion is a scam:

- Always read the fine print! Pay close attention to the details of the game promotion.
- Don't be deceived by official-looking mail that is disguised to initially mislead you into believing it is something other than a game promotion.
- Don't send any money to play the promotion – don't send entry fees, shipping fees, handling fees, etc. Some promotions require buying a "guaranteed" prize. Legitimate game promotions will not require you to buy anything to enter.
- Don't pay to collect sweepstakes winnings. If you have to pay to collect your winnings, you haven't won anything. Legitimate sweepstakes don't require you to pay "insurance," "taxes" or "shipping and handling charges" to collect your prize. Scammers pressure people to wire money through commercial money transfer companies like Western Union because wiring money is the same as sending cash. If you discover you've been scammed, the money's gone, and there's very little chance of recovery. Likewise, resist any push to send a check or money order by overnight delivery or courier. Con artists recommend these services so they can get to your money before you realize you've been cheated.
- Remember – if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Scams play on the hopes of those who believe they can get something for nothing.

For more consumer information, or help finding the right resource for assistance, give us a call today at 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) calling within Florida, 850-488-2221 outside of Florida, 1-800-FL-AYUDA (352-9832) ¡Español!, and a consumer specialist will be happy to assist you. You can also visit us online at [www.800helpfla.com](http://www.800helpfla.com).