

CONSUMER ALERT

A Publication from the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs

TRICK OR TREAT?

Watch out for scams that can seem like treats but often turn out to be tricks!



Job Hunting Scams:

Millions of people are searching for employment. In an effort to increase their chance of finding a job, consumers might be inclined to seek

assistance from job placement companies or pay fees upfront to potential employers.

Avoid the trick:

- Job placement firms typically earn their money from the employer, not the consumer.
- Steer clear of positions that require you to pay for tests or trainings upfront. You don't even know if you've gotten the job yet.
- Think twice about companies that guarantee they will find you a job.
- Don't believe the hype about paying to see 'unlisted' government jobs. Look here: jobs.sc.gov and usajobs.gov.
- If you find a listing on a third party site, contact the company that is hiring to verify details of the job posting.



Government Grant Scams: A scammer calls you up and says you qualify for a government grant because you have been a good consumer and paid your bills or taxes on time or paid them by check. This is a trick, so don't be fooled.

Avoid the trick:

- The number one indication that it's a scam is **asking for payment in order to receive the funds.**
- A real government agency won't ask you to pay a processing fee for a grant you've already been awarded.
 - Many times consumers duped by this scam never even applied for a grant. Keep that in mind when fielding phone calls or mail on this topic.
 - Visit grants.gov or your local library to search and apply for a grant.

Mystery Shopping: Companies hire mystery shoppers to make purchases at businesses and report on their experience. This trick starts with a letter and check saying you have been chosen to be a mystery shopper. The letter will outline the details of your payment and assignment. The last assignment usually requires you to test the wire transfer services at a local grocery

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store, etc. If it sounds too good to be true, IT PROBABLY IS.

Avoid the trick:

- Never wire money as part of a mystery shopping assignment.
- Never deposit checks from someone you don't know. If you do, you will be held liable if it bounces. **Why?** Because YOU are in the best position to know if the source of the check is trustworthy or not.
- Visit mysteryshop.org to look for some real secret shopper jobs.
- Keep in mind that you probably won't make hundreds and thousands of dollars as a mystery shopper. You are typically reimbursed the purchase price and keep the item you bought.
- Be wary of mystery shopper companies that require you to pay for "certification", guarantee a mystery shopping job or charge a fee to find mystery shopping jobs.

JEEPERS CREEPERS, PROTECT YOUR PEEPERS

Halloween is just around the corner and with all the costume contests, you might be looking for an edge. Just because cosmetic contact lenses might be readily available at your local convenience store, doesn't mean that they are safe.

Did you know that selling cosmetic contact lenses is illegal in the state of SC, unless they are prescribed by a licensed optometrist or ophthalmologist? So, if you didn't go to the doctor to get those lenses, steer clear of them. They can cause a whole host of medical problems, and in severe cases cost you your vision. If you still aren't convinced, take a look at some of the risks associated with these contact lenses:

- **Corneal Ulcers**, particularly when you wear them for an

extended period of time. Left untreated, this can result in blindness and even loss of your eye;



- **Corneal Swelling, allergic reaction, corneal abrasion, reduction in sight;**
- **Tight lens syndrome**- when your lens is not properly fitted, it can fit too tightly

and stick to the cornea.

If you see someone selling contact lenses without a license, report them to the Department (800.922.1594) or your eye care professional.

SCAM REPORTING AT SCDCA

One of the Department's most important missions is to educate the public on consumer issues. Giving you the tools to spot a scam and make informed

**HELP
REPORT
SCAMS**

decisions is a goal we strive for everyday. The Scam Line allows us to achieve this by tracking the most common scams as well as new ones that can trip up the savviest of consumers. We use this information to aid in the distribution of press releases, educational materials and presentations.

**Report a scam by calling
1-800-922-1594**

A SNAPSHOT OF FISCAL YEAR 2012

Every year SCDCA releases its Accountability Report. This report gives the public, the legislature and the agency itself a look at productivity in the previous year. It also helps the Department set goals for the upcoming year. Below you can see some interesting facts about SCDCA. If you would like to view the report in its entirety visit: <http://1.usa.gov/XKVIQq>



SCDCA FACILITATES RETURN OF CONSUMERS' PROPERTY

As the summer drew to a close, so did a pawn shop's tenure in Hilton Head. In August, Big Money Pawn was evicted from its location, leaving the fate of dozens of consumers' pawned items undetermined.

In an effort to resolve the issue, the Department of Consumer Affairs endeavored to help consumers retrieve their pawned items.

Notices were sent out to all the consumers with outstanding pawns setting dates and times for when they could retrieve their items.

Department Investigators closed out several of the outstanding pawn transactions on days scheduled in September and

October. The next days offered are anticipated to be a bit busier than the first two.



Investigators reuniting a consumer with their property.

When redeeming an item, consumers **MUST** bring: (1) a copy of their pawn ticket, (2) a picture ID, (3) the **EXACT AMOUNT** of the loan **IN CASH**. No interest will be charged and no change will be made. The two **FINAL** dates scheduled are:

Tuesday, November 20, 10am-6pm
Monday, December 3, 10am-6pm

RECALL ROUND-UP FROM CPSC

For a complete listing of recalled products, visit the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission at www.cpsc.gov. If you purchased a recalled product, the retailer should have information for you. If you find a recalled item on the shelf or have questions about recalled products, contact the CPSC at 800.638.2772. For information on recalls not conducted with CPSC visit recall.gov.



SkilSaw Miter Saw

The lower guard can break and contact the blade during use, posing a laceration hazard to users.



Bonzai Water Slide

During use, the slide can deflate, allowing the user to hit the ground underneath the slide and become injured.

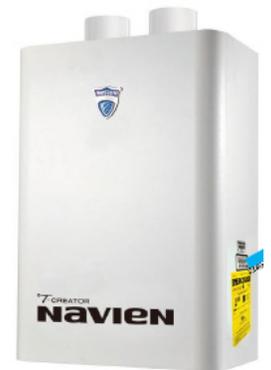
Children's Jogging Stroller

The front wheel can come loose during use, causing the stroller to overturn, resulting in serious injuries to user and on-board children.



Navien Instantaneous Hot Water Heater

The unit can leak CO₂ gas.



HELP WITH YOUR MORTGAGE

Consumers who were financially harmed during the foreclosure process may be entitled to compensation or other remedy. This opportunity comes from two enforcement actions brought by both state and federal regulators against certain mortgage servicers. There is no cost to participate in the programs.

THE NATIONAL MORTGAGE SETTLEMENT

In February 2012, state and federal regulators announced a \$25 billion settlement with the country's five largest mortgage servicers. See the information below on how the settlement might help you and what other options are available if you are having difficulty making your mortgage payment.

BORROWER HELP

The National Mortgage Settlement ("Settlement") requires **Ally/GMAC, Bank of America, Citi, JPMorgan Chase, and Wells Fargo** ("Servicer(s)") to take actions that make foreclosure a last resort. Here are a few of the requirements meant to help consumers avoid foreclosure:

Loss mitigation. Before referring a mortgage to foreclosure, the Servicer must let a borrower know of all available options to avoid foreclosure (ie:

loss mitigation programs). If a borrower submits a complete loan modification application, the Servicer must review it and make a decision within 30 days.

Required Notices:

Pre-foreclosure Notice: At least 14 days before a loan is referred to foreclosure, the Servicer must send the borrower a letter that explains the status of their loan and contains, among other things, an itemized account summary and a summary of the loss mitigation efforts

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taken by the Servicer to date.

Post Referral to Foreclosure Solicitation Letter:

Within 5 business days of referral to foreclosure, the Servicer must send the borrower a letter indicating that it is not too late for the borrower to apply for loan modification or consider other loss mitigation options. Information on the loan modification process and the Servicer’s contact information must also be included.

No Luck? There still may be hope. A Notice of Foreclosure Intervention may help you avoid foreclosure. Visit <http://bit.ly/UPgGVr> for information on an Administrative Order issued by the SC Supreme Court.

OPEN & READ YOUR MAIL CAREFULLY
One of these letters could be your lifeline!

supposed to send letters to qualified borrowers about the Review, consumers can find out if they are eligible by visiting independentforeclosurereview.com or calling 888-952-9105

Meet the deadline! If you are eligible, a “Request for Review” form must be submitted on or before December 31, 2012.

Not sure who your servicer is? Visit www.mersservicerid.org/sis/index.jsp.

POST-FORECLOSURE HELP

Under the terms of the Settlement, consumers who lost their home to foreclosure may be eligible to receive at least \$840.

Forms are being sent out. Notices and claim forms are being sent out to 2 million borrowers. If you have questions or think that you should have received a form you can contact the Settlement Administrator by calling 866-430-8358.

Meet the deadline! If you are eligible, claim forms must be submitted online at nationalmortgagesettlementclaim.com/ or via mail by January 18, 2013. For more information on the settlement visit www.nationalmortgagesettlement.com.

THE FEDERAL SETTLEMENT

Under the terms of the Federal Settlement, some mortgage borrowers may be eligible for an Independent Foreclosure Review to determine if they were harmed during the foreclosure process. If the reviewer finds that the mortgage servicer’s errors, misrepresentations or deficiencies during the foreclosure process caused the consumer harm, an appropriate remedy will be given.

Who to contact. While participating servicers were

NONE OF THIS APPLIES TO YOU?

- **Resources.** Consumers can visit SCDCA’s “Help for Homeowners” page, www.consumer.sc.gov (“Consumer Information”, “Help for Homeowners”) for links to information on the Making Home Affordable Program®, frequently asked questions for consumers facing foreclosure in SC, and other resources to help you stay in your home or otherwise avoid foreclosure.
- **Contact a Housing Counselor.** South Carolina Legal Services may be able to assist you with avoiding foreclosure –www.sclegal.org/ 888-257-1988. Consumers can also look on DCA’s website for a listing of licensed counselors- www.consumer.sc.gov (“Licensee Lookup”, “Credit Counseling”)
- **Fannie Mae & Freddie Mac Loans.** If your loan is owned by either Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac, click on the appropriate link below for assistance with your mortgage:
 - www.knowyouroptions.com (for Fannie Mae homeowners)
 - www.freddiemac.com/avoidforeclosure (for Freddie Mac homeowners)

SCAM ALERT!

If you are eligible, you will receive correspondence through the mail, not phone or e-mail. Also, THERE IS NOT COST TO PARTICIPATE. Keep these red flags in mind if a “company” or “counselor” offering you foreclosure help:

1. Guarantees to stop the foreclosure process-no matter your circumstances.
2. Advises you not to contact your lender, lawyer or credit/housing counselor.
3. Collects a fee before providing services.

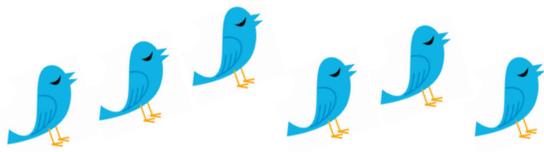
Thank You Twitter Followers!



We recently reached our



2,000th TWEET!



Looking for updates on the latest scams and consumer issues? Then you definitely need to follow us on Twitter @SCDCA!

Your Information Destination!



Check out our YouTube channel.
youtube.com/scdcatv



Look here for updates & educational materials.
facebook.com/scdca



Find the latest scam alerts and news here.
twitter.com/scdca

don't forget about the website: www.consumer.sc.gov

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

Established by the Consumer Protection Code in 1974, the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs represents the interests of South Carolina consumers. Our mission is to protect consumers from inequities in the marketplace through advocacy, mediation, enforcement and education. The Department strives to be a CREDIT to our State: Competence Respect Equality Dedication Integrity Timeliness. For more information on SCDCA, visit www.consumer.sc.gov.

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