

NEWS FROM SCDCA

South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs



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December 13, 2006
Release #06-136
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HOLIDAY SHOPPING SCAMS: ONLINE SHOPPING

Columbia, SC... ...Christmas is just around the corner, and many shoppers are looking for that special gift for their loved one. Unfortunately, the holiday shopping season is a busy time for scammers, too. In an effort to inform South Carolina consumers about holiday shopping scams this year, the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs (SCDCA) is releasing a three-part series entitled “Holiday Shopping Scams.”

“Holiday Shopping Scams: Online Shopping”

Scammers looking to cash in on the big spending season are devising new scams and techniques this season. One con artist is scamming consumers by placing online ads for puppies, a favorite gift with kids of all ages, which do not exist. Other scammers are “phishing” and “pharming” to steal consumers’ financial information. In all cases, consumers are fooled to believe the products and sites are legitimate.

“The Puppy Scam”:

The seller advertises a “free” puppy in return for shipping costs or a long-distance call for further information. In many of the ads, the seller claims he lives overseas and has a number of puppies available for just the cost of shipping. The scammer collects the money spent by the consumer on shipping costs or long-distance, international phone calls but never delivers the promised puppy. The online ads are mixed with, and therefore easily mistaken for, legitimate offers.

About the 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.

For more information, visit www.sconsumer.gov.

Before pursuing more information from the seller or attempting to get one of the pups, call the advertisement's sponsoring website to confirm the ad is legitimate.

Online Shopping Tips: Phishing and Pharming

Phishing, which has escalated in the past few months, is the use of fraudulent websites or e-mails to solicit financial information. Consumers are often asked to click on a link in an e-mail. The name on the link may be a legitimate company or site; however, the actual takes the consumer to a fake website. After the consumer provides financial information, the scammer is able to access their account. Consumers should avoid clicking on links within the e-mail. Instead, consumers should type the company's address directly in the address bar to confirm that the real website is asking for the information listed in the e-mail.

The Federal Trade Commission cautions consumers to be suspicious of e-mails with the following statements: "Official information" or "Urgent information to all credit card holders!" Consumers should also avoid e-mails that ask them to identify themselves, or "update," "validate," or "confirm" their account information. These words and phrases are often used in phishing scams.

Pharming differs slightly from phishing. Phishing involves the creation of a new, counterfeit site, but pharming involves the corruption of an existing site. Pharming occurs when a scammer corrupts the URL site address. This process is often called DNS poisoning. Consumers type in the domain name of the site they want to visit, but without their knowledge, consumers are automatically sent to a fraudulent website that mimics the real version. The scammer collects login, password, and financial information from the consumer. Some sites issue certificates to verify they are who they say they are. Consumers should make sure the name on the certificate matches the domain site they are trying to visit. Sites, however, are not required to have certificates.

"Holiday Shopping Scams: Holiday Sweepstakes" will be released next week. For more information, contact the Public Information & Education Division at 803.734.4190, toll free at 1.800.922.1594 or online at www.sccoconsumer.gov.

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