

# NEWS FROM SCDCA

South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs



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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS SEEING MORE ECONOMIC STIMULUS SCAMS

**Columbia, SC** – With so much news about economic stimulus packages and the country’s economic recovery plans, consumers are hoping some of this stimulus money will funnel down to them. This is the perfect opening for con artists to try to scam the vulnerable. The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs (SCDCA) has received numerous reports of scams using the stimulus package – each with a different twist – to steal personal information and/or money.

One of the more brazen twists uses President Barack Obama’s image to persuade consumers. SCDCA has received a number of forwarded emails from alert consumers who are suspicious of the offer. The mail, featuring a photograph of President Obama, promises a free stimulus check in varying amounts of from \$613.27 to several thousand dollars. Consumers are directed to another link where they must “participate in the program” in order to receive the check.

Participation requires completion of several “reward offers” such as magazine subscriptions that the consumer must purchase or a credit card which can only be activated with a purchase. Although the offers themselves may or may not be real products, the consumer will have to spend money on things they possibly didn’t need, plus they will not receive a stimulus check just for participating in the program.

The Department has also received calls from consumers concerning other e-mails they have received. The e-mail claims to be from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and asks them for sensitive information such as a bank account number or Social Security number in order to process their portion of the stimulus package. Consumers should remember that the IRS or any other government agency will never contact you regarding rebates or refunds via e-mail. Additionally, the IRS will never ask you for personal information.

Another twist on this scam arrives by US mail and contains an actual check, again in varying amounts. Of course the check is fake, but it looks very real. The accompanying literature instructs

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Our mission is to protect consumers from inequities in the marketplace through advocacy, mediation, enforcement and education.

For more information, visit [www.scconsumer.gov](http://www.scconsumer.gov).

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consumers to call a toll free number for further instructions. Callers are then instructed to deposit the check but to wire a certain amount back to either enter into foreclosure rescue, or if you're not in foreclosure, to purchase a foreclosure "kit" with instructions on how to use the stimulus money to buy foreclosed properties in your area. This scam is for the needy as well as the greedy, but it is a scam nonetheless.

Homeowners qualifying for mortgage assistance or restructuring under the housing portion of the Economic Recovery Plan *may* be telephone by their lender just to expedite matters, but they should verify that the caller does indeed represent that lender. Consumers are urged to contact the Department if they are suspicious of anything they receive that purports to represent stimulus money.

For more information, contact the Public Information Division at 803.734.4190, toll free in SC at 1.800.922.1594, or online at [www.sconsumer.gov](http://www.sconsumer.gov).

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