

NEWS FROM SCDCA

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

Carri Grube Lybarker, Administrator



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 23, 2015 | Release #15-021

Contact: Juliana Harris, (803) 734-4296

Tis the Season for Deceiving: Tips for Avoiding Holiday Scammers

COLUMBIA, S.C. – With the holiday season fast approaching, the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs (SCDCA) is urging consumers to take steps to safeguard personal information. Whether traveling to see family members or taking advantage of the sales on Black Friday and Cyber Monday, the following tips could save consumers a lot of trouble this holiday season.

For peace of mind when traveling:

1. **Don't let mail pile up.** An overflowing mailbox is a clear sign that no one is home, and gives scammers access to personal information from things such as bills or preapproved credit offers. Visit usps.com/holdmail for more information on the USPS mail hold service.
2. **Leave personal documents at home.** A social security card, checkbook, medical documents, etc. can be exploited if lost or stolen. Reduce your risk by only taking documents you will need.
3. **Be wary of using public or shared internet.** While free Wi-Fi at airports, hotels, or restaurants is convenient, it is not always secure. Avoid transmitting sensitive personal and financial information over public Wi-Fi networks.
4. **Keep your cell phone secure.** A cell phone can contain a wealth of personal and financial information. Consider using anti-virus software and a password to secure the information on all your mobile devices.

Keep these tips in mind to avoid becoming a fake charity scam victim:

1. **Donate to well-known charities.** This will help you avoid donating to fake charities that pop up during the holiday season and disappear just as quickly. Check to see if the charity is registered with the SC Secretary of State, www.sos.sc.gov or 1-888-CHARITI (242-7484)
2. **Ask cold callers to send information in the mail.** Real charities should have no problem sending additional materials in the mail. A sign of a scam is high-pressure tactics meant to push you to donate immediately. A safe practice is never to give out personal or financial information over the phone to a cold caller.
3. **Avoid charities soliciting door-to-door.** Seeking out a charity, rather than donating to one that targets you will reduce the chances of falling victim to a scam.

Protect your information on the two biggest shopping days of the year, Black Friday and Cyber Monday, and:

1. **Shop from secure sites.** Look for HTTPS in the web address and a padlock icon in the browser window.
2. **Cash, Debit or Credit?** Choose cash if you have trouble sticking to a budget. Shopping online? Credit cards offer the most consumer protections.

3. **Monitor financial statements.** Scammers can steal your information in store or online. Be sure to carefully review financial statements as soon as you receive them.

For more information on shopping safe and smart, check out SCDCA's 25 Days of Holiday Shopping Tips on social media! Follow @SCDCA on Twitter or track #HolidayShopping from December 1 to Christmas Day. Also, visit www.consumer.sc.gov to view additional tips and information to protect against fraudsters this holiday season.

About SCDCA

The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs aims to protect consumers from inequities in the marketplace through advocacy, complaint mediation, enforcement and education. To file a complaint or get information on consumer issues, visit www.consumer.sc.gov or call toll-free, 1-800-922-1594.

###

