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OFFICE OF THE  
DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
COUNTY OF SHASTA



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**Press Release**

Fake Check Scam Targeting Senior Citizens  
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The Shasta County District Attorney's Office Consumer Protection Division has recently received information regarding a scam which appears to be targeting the Shasta County area.

Last week the District Attorney's Consumer Protection Division received an email from Jessica A. Cunningham, MBA, Director of the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program, which is a Golden Umbrella program serving Shasta and Tehama counties,. This email, which was written and distributed by the County of Los Angeles Department of Consumer Affairs, outlined a new scam targeting seniors across Southern California.

The scam, which uses fake checks that appear to be from the County of Los Angeles, attempts to lure victims into wiring money to thieves in Canada.

Here is how the scam works. The victim, usually a senior citizen, receives an official-looking "final notice" claiming to be from "Canada Customs and Revenue Agency." The notice tells the victims that they won a lottery prize, and urges them to call immediately to claim their winnings. When the victims call, the "official" tells them that he has to pay a customs fee. To reassure the victim, the thief offers to mail him a check, and asks him to deposit the check in his bank account and wire the funds back to claim his prize. The victim then receives a check that looks like it was issued by the County of Los Angeles. Convinced this is the real thing, the victim deposits the check and wires the money via MoneyGram to British Columbia, Canada. Days later, the victim's bank tells him that the check bounced and he needs to pay the money. The victim, of course, never gets the prize.

One such incident, reported to the Shasta County District Attorney's office on Monday by a local citizen, had just a slight variation than the scenario described in the email from Los Angeles.

The Shasta County citizen was advised that there was a package at the Vancouver International Airport that was addressed to him containing \$88,000 dollars. The letter explains that taxes are owed on the money and the sender of the package could not be located.

The letter also contained a check from the “County of Los Angeles” in the amount of \$3,130 for the tax payment. The letter advises the citizen to call an individual immediately at a given phone number. The letter also gives instruction to only use a “moneygram” for payment of the taxes and explains where the money/tax payment should be wired, which by the way was to the Country of Canada.

Had the local citizen fallen victim to this scam, he would have cashed this check, wired the money to Canada as instructed, never to see the \$88,000. Eventually he would have been contacted by the bank where he cashed the check, which was found to be forged and asked to pay the money back, which of course he no longer has since as it was wired to a foreign country.

The Shasta County D.A.’s Office Consumer Protection Division offers these tips for consumers to spot and avoid fake check scams:

**Never wire money to strangers.** There is no reason for someone to pay you by check and ask you to wire back some of the money.

**Fake checks look real.** Even some bank tellers are fooled by some fake checks. However, just because the bank accepts the fake check and releases the funds, it doesn’t mean the check is good. It can take weeks for the bank to find out and tell you that the check is bad.

**You are responsible for fake checks you deposit.** When a fake check bounces, the bank will deduct money from your account or even sue you to recover the funds. If you deposit a check you know is fake, you can be prosecuted.

**It is very hard to get your money back.** Thieves often live in other countries out of the reach of U.S. authorities. Your best protection is not to send them money no matter what they promise you.

**If it sounds too good to be true, it is.** Don’t believe promises that you won a lottery or drawing you never entered.

Consumers must protect themselves against these scams because once they wire money to thieves it is virtually impossible to get it back, especially if wired to a foreign country.

For further information, contact Investigator Mike Baxter of the Shasta County District Attorney’s Office Consumer Protection Division at (530) 245-6300.

\*\*\*\*\* **Below is a copy of the check** \*\*\*\*\*

