

## **Consumer Alert: International Mail Fraud Scheme Identified**

*Consumers Should Contact the Ohio Department of Insurance Fraud Division if They  
Receive What Appears to be a \$4,500 Check From Nationwide Insurance*

*Columbus, OH* - The Ohio Department of Insurance and Nationwide Insurance are working together to warn consumers of an international mail fraud scheme to help make sure Ohioans do not find themselves the victim of fraud.

Consumers in as many as 10 states have reportedly received counterfeit checks that appeared to originate from Nationwide Insurance. Each of the bogus checks was issued for \$4,500 and came with a letter informing the recipient that they won a \$150,000 "Consumer Promotion Draw" for consumers who shop in major stores in the US, Canada and United Kingdom. The letter also explains the \$4,500 check was issued to cover the "Non-Resident Government Tax" the consumer will have to pay to a British Tax Officer. The individuals sending these letters and counterfeit checks have no affiliation with Nationwide Insurance and are illegally using the Nationwide name.

Recipients are told that to receive the \$150,000 prize, they must cash the check and then send \$3,750, by Moneygram International or Western Union Money Transfer, to an address located in the United Kingdom. While consumers are given a toll-free number to call, they are asked not to talk about their winnings until the claim has been processed.

Consumers should beware of "advanced fee scams" like this as they could lose a great deal of money. In this particular situation, if a consumer were to cash the phony check, they could find themselves owing the bank between \$3,750 and \$4,500.

As consumers are defrauded of millions of dollars each year, the Department would like to provide Ohioans with the following tips so they do not find themselves the victim of a mail fraud scheme:

- If an offer sounds too good to be true, it probably is.
- Be skeptical of any correspondence offering you the opportunity to win a large sum of money in exchange for specific information.
- Be leery of checks received from companies you do not do business with. The check is most likely fraudulent.
- If the name of a well known company is noted on the correspondence received, contact the company to verify the legitimacy of the letter.
- Be wary of sweepstakes or contests that require you to send money to a P.O. Box, a drop-box or an overseas address before you can claim your prize.

The Department and Nationwide are investigating who may be behind this scheme to defraud consumers. Ohioans who receive or have received what appears to be a \$4,500 check from Nationwide Insurance should immediately contact the Ohio Department of Insurance Fraud Division at 1-800-686-1527 or the Nationwide Customer Relations Department at 1-800-882-2822.