



ATTORNEY GENERAL'S

SCAM ALERT



A Consumer Protection Alert from Oregon Attorney General John Kroger

November 23, 2009

Consumer Protection Hotline: 1-877-877-9392.

Online: www.doj.state.or.us.

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TIPS FOR WISE INTERNET HOLIDAY SHOPPING

With the holiday season fast approaching, Attorney General John Kroger reminds consumers to use caution when purchasing big ticket items on the internet. Since January 1, 2009 the Oregon Department of Justice has received well over 600 written complaints about internet retailers. The most common complaints include: (1) Failure to deliver the goods purchased; (2) Failure to honor a warranty; and, (3) Using false or misleading statements, such as marketing a product as "free," when there are hidden costs involved.

The National Retail Federation estimates that nearly half of all Americans will do some of their holiday shopping on-line. While convenient for many, Attorney General John Kroger offers the following tips to consumers when shopping on-line:

1. **Research prices.** Similar items typically fall into a general price range. Scammers will try to entice victims to their websites with ridiculously low prices. Also, remember to account for shipping and handling in the cost of on-line purchases.
2. **Know the seller.** Anyone can set-up shop online. Confirm the online seller's physical address and phone number in case you have any problems or questions.
3. **Update your anti-virus software.** Make sure you have installed the latest firewall and anti-virus software to protect your computer against online attacks.
4. **Transmit financial information only on secure sites.** Do not e-mail financial information, like your credit card or checking account number. If you initiate a

purchase on-line, look for indicators that the site is secure. Although no indicator is fool-proof, look for a lock icon on the browsers status bar, or a URL address that includes an "s" (ie. https).

5. **Do not send cash or wire money for payment.** Do not simply wire money via Western Union or Money Gram for items purchased on-line; you may be giving your money to scammers, and you may never get the item you "ordered." Pay by credit or charge card. The Fair Credit and Billing Act protects purchases made with a credit card. If payment by credit card is not possible, contact a bank or reputable escrow company about ways to safely conduct the money transfer.
6. **Keep a paper trail.** Print and save records of all your on-line transactions, including the product description, price, on-line receipt, and e-mails.
7. **Review the refund policy and delivery rates.** Look to see if you can return a product for a full refund if you are not satisfied. Check out who pays for the cost of shipping a returned item. Is there a "restocking" fee for returning an item?
8. **Watch out for bogus loan or credit offers.** Pitched to consumers who need extra money for the holiday season, many of the credit and loan offers seen in supermarket tabloids, classified sections of the newspaper, Craigslist, or on a telephone pole are scams. Others are predatory lenders that charge exorbitant fees and interest rates for the small amount loaned. If you are asked to pay a fee in advance to get a loan or credit card, it is probably a scam.

Scammers exploit the holiday season's giving atmosphere to pad their own pockets. The Oregon Department of Justice is committed to protecting the marketplace from fraud and scam. If you or someone you know has a question about an internet purchase, or fallen victim to an internet scam, call the Department's free Consumer Hotline for help at 1-877-877-9392.

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