

Ohio Attorney General's Consumer Advocate Newsletter

Keeping Consumers Safe and Informed



June 2022



Beware of Scam Artists During County and State Fair Season

For many Ohioans, this might be the first year since the start of the pandemic to return to the Ohio State Fair and local fairs. But while you take in the blue-ribbon winners, you should also keep an eye open for red flags warning you of fraudsters.

The Ohio Attorney General's Consumer Protection Section offers fairgoers the following tips and information for a scam-free experience:

- **Be cautious when asked for personal information to enter a sweepstakes, contest or drawing for a prize.** Read each contest or sweepstakes entry form you sign, especially the small print. Companies often use entry forms as a marketing tool. Even if you're on the national Do-Not-Call Registry, by entering the contest you might be giving a company permission to call you, and you might even consent to the sale of your personal information to other companies.
- **Be skeptical of "free" vacation offers.** Strings are frequently attached to free or bargain travel, which might require buying an expensive second ticket or listening to a long sales pitch. Furthermore, the offer might have so many conditions, restrictions and hidden costs that you

can't possibly schedule the trip even though you've already paid for it. When in doubt, remember the adage *If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.*

- **Know your rights before signing a contract.** In Ohio, generally, if you're at a fair and sign an agreement with a company to provide you with a product or service valued at \$25 or more, you have the right to cancel the contract. Your reason for canceling can be as simple as buyer's remorse. Whatever the reason, as long as you cancel before midnight of the third business day after signing a contract, you are no longer obligated to the terms of the contract. This three-day right to cancel, part of Ohio's Home Solicitation Sales Act, typically applies when a sale occurs at a location outside the seller's regular place of business, such as at the consumer's home, a fair booth or a hotel meeting room. The salesperson must advise you of your right to cancel and provide you with a separate form that explains how to exercise that right.
- **Watch out for deceptive displays or misrepresentations.** Companies are generally required to provide consumers with all the facts before the sale. For example, if there are a certain number of products that must be purchased to obtain the advertised price, that information must be noted along with any other exceptions that would prevent the consumer from receiving what the company is advertising.

Need help with a consumer problem or question? Contact the Ohio Attorney General's Office at www.OhioProtects.org or 800-282-0515.

Nobody Is Immune: All Generations Susceptible to Scams

News articles and research drive the point home: People of all ages – not just older Ohioans – fall victim to scams, and education and scam awareness are the best tools to prevent it.

“For years now, the Better Business Bureau's survey research has shown that younger adults lose money to swindlers much more often than the older people you may think of as stereotypical victims,” the [New York Times](#) reported in June 2021 in a story that considered all types of fraud and scams. “The Federal Trade Commission reports similar figures, with 44 percent of people ages 20 to 29 losing money to fraud, more than double the 20 percent of people ages 70 to 79.”

CNBC underscored the point months later in the article [“Tech-savvy teens falling prey to online scams faster than their grandparents.”](#)

“The number of individuals age 20 or younger – members of Generation Z, who have grown up on smartphones and the internet – reporting they are victims of cyber-fraud has surged 156% over the last three years. ... That compares to 112% growth during the same time among people age 60 or older, the group with the next-fastest scam growth.”

A [recent study by SEON](#), a company that offers solutions for preventing online fraud, found that consumers younger than 20 experienced the largest increase in online fraud in 2020 – and by a staggering amount: 116% over the previous year.

But the study also found that older generations remain the most vulnerable to such fraud.

Older adults, for example, lose more money per victim than younger consumers. According to SEON, fraud victims in their 20s lost a combined \$197 million (an average of \$2,789 per victim), victims in their 50s lost \$848 million (\$9,864 per victim), and victims 60 and older lost more than \$966 million (\$9,174 per victim).

To help spot a scam, look for these red flags:

- You're asked to wire money or send a gift card to a stranger.
- You've won a contest you've never heard of or entered.
- You're pressured to "Act now!"
- You have to pay a fee to receive your prize.
- Your personal information is requested.
- A large down payment is requested.
- The company refuses to provide any information in writing.
- You're asked to keep conversations a secret.
- You're guaranteed to make money.

The various studies and articles about scams reinforce the importance of educating consumers of all ages. By identifying how to spot scams and sharing the experiences of those who have fallen victim to con artists, the Attorney General's Office and its partners can ensure that Ohioans are prepared to resist scammers who are determined to steal their personal information and money.

If you suspect a scam or have problems you can't resolve on your own, contact the Ohio Attorney General's Office at www.OhioProtects.org or 800-282-0515.

Consumer Protection Presentations and Videos Available to the Public

When it comes to fighting fraud, the best offense is a good defense – which is why the Attorney General's Office (AGO) offers a wide range of consumer protection presentations to educate consumers about the latest trends and scams.

AGO representatives are available to provide important information about fraud, cybersecurity, identity theft and, most important, how to protect yourself and your wallet.

Available topics include:

Consumer Scams

Scammers use a variety of tactics to make their offers seem legitimate. This presentation explores the most common types of scams faced by consumers and discusses ways to reduce the risk of identity theft. Learn to recognize the signs of a scam to protect yourself and those you care about.

Cybersecurity Help, Information and Protection Program (CHIPP)

As consumers of all ages rely increasingly on technology, it is vital that they understand how to protect their electronic devices and keep personal information private. Learn about the importance of security and privacy, including special challenges related to smartphones and other mobile devices. Separate CHIPP presentations are available for teen and adult audiences.

Know Your Rights: A Consumer Guide for Students

This presentation explains students' rights as consumers. They will learn to recognize unfair sales practices and gain the knowledge they need to spend wisely in today's economy.

Protect Yourself from Identity Theft

Identity theft is a growing trend among all populations nationwide. Learn how to protect yourself and, if you become a victim, to address the effects.

Senior Scams

Seniors (60 and older) are particularly vulnerable to fraud and scams, but many incidents likely go unreported. Learn about the latest scams targeting the senior population, and find out how to protect yourself and your loved ones.

Shop Smart: Know Your Rights

Ohio's consumer laws will protect you from the savviest scams – if only you knew what they were! The Ohio Attorney General's Office receives about 25,000 consumer complaints each year. Find out the top complaint categories and learn how to protect yourself from fraud.

Attorney General's Office Scam Videos

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost has a multi-media outreach initiative to increase Ohioans' awareness of COVID-19 scams, identity theft and how to spot the red flags of common scams.

To ensure more Ohio consumers know about scams and how the Attorney General's Office can be a resource, the Ohio Attorney General's Office created the new animated videos. Please note for the identity theft video [AnnualCreditReport.com](https://www.annualcreditreport.com) has extended the availability of free weekly credit reports until December 2022! The videos can be viewed [here](#).

If your company, organization or club would like to host a presentation, [complete the request form](#) or contact us at 800-282-0515. In-person and online presentations are available.

Beware of Cryptocurrency Scams

Considering an investment in cryptocurrency? Make sure you understand how it works and keep up on the scams it generates.

Cryptocurrency is a form of payment that can be exchanged online for goods and services or held as an investment. Common types of cryptocurrency are Bitcoin, Ethereum, Dogecoin, Tether and Polkadot.

Cryptocurrencies work using blockchain, a technology that manages and records transactions across many linked computers. Users buy cryptocurrency through an online exchange platform. Others earn cryptocurrency through a complex process called “mining,” which requires advanced computer equipment to solve highly complicated math puzzles.

Potential investors should do their research first – cryptocurrency is complex and not regulated by any state or federal government agency. As a starting point, here are some things you should know:

Impostor wallets: Cryptocurrency is stored in a “digital wallet,” which can be online, on your computer or on an external hard drive. A mobile payment or digital wallet app simply refers to a program you use on your smartphone that allows you to quickly and easily send funds to someone else. Make sure to confirm that you are sending funds to the correct wallet. Scammers use impostor wallets to redirect funds intended for someone else.

Social media scams: If you read a tweet, a text or an email message, or get a message on social media, directing you to send cryptocurrency, it’s likely a scam. Once you send cryptocurrency, it’s gone; your money cannot be recovered.

Referral scams: Referral scams work in a similar way to pyramid schemes. This scam depends on recruiting investors in several investment tiers, with the idea being that the more you invest and get others to invest, the greater your return. The scam comes when investors attempt to withdraw their supposed profits: They are told to invest more cryptocurrency and get nothing back.

Giveaway scams: Giveaway scams falsely proclaim to be sponsored by celebrities and tell potential victims they are guaranteed to immediately multiply the amount of cryptocurrency they are asked to send. Typically, victims don’t get any jackpot, award or any other giveaway; they have been duped. Investors lose the value of whatever crypto they sent.

Romance scams: Scammers are using online dating sites to recruit new investors in sham crypto investments under the ploy of a legitimate romance. Always be suspicious if someone you have met only online is encouraging you to invest in a product or send money, especially if the request is for cryptocurrency. Much like the use of gift cards in scams, once you give cryptocurrency to another person or account, it is almost impossible to retrieve.

Need help addressing a consumer problem or question? Contact the Ohio Attorney General’s Office at www.OhioProtects.org or 800-282-0515.

REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!

The Ohio Attorney General's Elder Abuse Commission, in observance of Ohio's **2022 Elder Abuse Awareness Day**, will present a free webinar.

A STRONG AND JUST OHIO: REFRAMING THE ELDER ABUSE DISCUSSION

Wednesday, June 22, 2022 | 1-4:30 p.m.

Registration is required



Help us
to increase
awareness of elder
abuse across Ohio.
It's everyone's
business!

Free CLE, CEU and Law Enforcement credits are pending. (Note: No professional credits will be offered to attendees who participate via the "audio conference only" option.)

On the day of the event, early sign-in is encouraged to ensure proper access to the WebEx platform.

For more information about the webinar or to learn more about the Elder Abuse Commission, call 800-282-0515 or go to www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov and search for "Elder Abuse Commission."



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