# Tips to Protect Against Elder Fraud

**Elder financial abuse costs older Americans more than $2.6 billion per year. Follow these three steps to identify and protect against elder fraud.**

1. Recognize the "red flags" of fraud.
2. Recognize the signs of victimization and how to help.
3. Inform and educate on how to reduce the number of unwanted sales calls and mailings and how to deal effectively with telemarketers.

## The 1ST STEP is helping older people recognize the "red flags" of fraud:

- A promise to win money, make money, or borrow money easily;
- A demand to act immediately or else miss out on this great opportunity;
- A refusal to send written information before agreeing to buy or donate;
- An attempt to scare the victim into buying something;
- Insistence on wiring money or having a courier pick up a payment; and,
- A refusal to stop calling after being asked not to call again.

**Seniors need to know that:**

- It's illegal for companies that operate contests or sweepstakes to ask one to pay to enter or claim a prize or even suggest that chances of winning will improve if there is a purchase;
- It's illegal for telemarketers to ask for a fee upfront to help get a loan if they guarantee or strongly imply that the loans will be made;
- There is no reason to give a credit card number or bank account number to a telemarketer unless a payment is actually being made with that account; and,
- If payment is required before getting detailed information about the offer, it's probably a scam.

## The 2ND STEP is to recognize when older people have been victimized or may be in grave danger and know how to help them. Seniors may be in trouble if they:

- Receive lots of mail for contests, "free trips," prizes, and sweepstakes or literature from foreign countries;
- Get frequent calls from strangers offering great deals or asking for charitable contributions;
- Make repeated and/or large payments to companies in other states or countries;
- Have difficulty buying groceries and paying utility and other bills;
- Subscribe to more magazines than anyone could normally read;

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- Receive lots of cheap items such as costume jewelry, beauty products, water filters, and knick knacks that they bought to win something or received as prizes;
- Get calls from organizations offering to recover, for a fee, money they have lost to fraudulent telemarketers.

**If you are trying to help an older person with a telemarketing fraud problem, don't be critical. It could happen to anyone—con artists are very good at what they do. Encourage them to:**

- Report actual or attempted fraud to the National Fraud Information Center, 800-876-7060. That information will be transmitted to law enforcement agencies;
- Change their phone number if con artists call repeatedly; and,
- Change their bank account or credit card numbers if they have fallen into the hands of thieves.

## The 3RD STEP in fighting telemarketing fraud is to inform older people about how to reduce the number of unwanted sales calls and mailings they receive and how to deal effectively with telemarketers.

- Avoid getting on sucker lists. Don't fill out contest entry forms at fairs or malls—they are a common source of "leads" for con artists. Ask companies with whom business is done not to share personal information with other marketers.
- Eliminate junk mail. Use a service such as Tonic Mailstopper (http://mailstopper.tonic.com) to stop junk mail from being delivered.
- Know the "Do-Not-Call" rights. Under federal law, a telemarketer can be instructed not to call a number again. Call 1-888-382-1222 or register online at www.donotcall.gov.
- Know who the telemarketing company is. If it's an unfamiliar company or charity, check it out with the state or local consumer protection agency and the Better Business Bureau. Check out a business online at http://www.bbb.org/us/Find-Business-Reviews/.
- Screen calls. Use an answering machine, Caller ID, or other services available from the phone company to help determine who to talk to and who to avoid.
- Have a plan for speaking to telemarketers. Before the phone is answered, know what questions to ask or what to say. Be polite, but firm. Hang up if someone refuses to answer questions or any "red flags" of fraud are detected.
- Know that a phone number may be collected. When a company is called, the number from which the call is placed can be displayed through Automatic Number Identification (ANI). If the call is about an account with the business, this enables the customer service representative to pull up appropriate records and provide help faster, but ANI can also be used for marketing purposes. Ask what information is being collected and tell the company if you don't want to be put on a marketing list.

*www.fraud.org*

*http://www.tradingmarkets.com/.site/news/Stock%20News/2226070/*

For more information or to make a patient referral, please call Eastern Maine HomeCare toll-free at 1.866.591.8843.