

## Beware of Counterfeit Checks

Check fraud is one of the largest challenges facing businesses and financial institutions today. With the advancement of computer technology it is increasingly easy for criminals to manipulate checks in such a way as to deceive innocent victims expecting value in exchange for their money.

A significant amount of check fraud is due to counterfeiting through desktop publishing and copying to create or duplicate an actual financial document, as well as chemical alteration, which consists of removing some or all of the information and manipulating it to the benefit of the criminal. Victims include financial institutions, businesses who accept and issue checks, and the consumer. In most cases, these crimes begin with the theft of a financial document. It can be perpetrated as easily as someone stealing a blank check from your home or vehicle during a burglary, searching for a canceled or old check in the garbage, or removing a check you have mailed to pay a bill from the mailbox. **"Official Checks", "Cashier's Checks", and "Certified Checks"** are also counterfeited in order to dupe the recipient that the item is "as good as currency".

Often a counterfeit check is used to scam people into believing that won an International Lottery, or some sort of Sweepstakes. Another common scam is a fraudster sending a counterfeit check for payment for an item purchased over the internet. Often, this check will be for more than the price of the item with instructions to "wire the difference" back to the purchaser, or to a third party for "shipping expenses".

Be careful of accepting checks for large dollar amounts from people you are not familiar with. Contact the financial institution, and attempt to verify issuance of the check. When you call the financial institution, use a telephone number that is independently obtained. Never call a telephone number that is pre-printed on the check, or that was provided by the person who gave you the check. If you are suspicious of the item, don't hesitate to show it to a branch employee, who can help to verify the check.