

New York - State Comptroller Warns About Mystery Shopper Scam Using Fake State Checks

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New York - New York State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli today warned of a mystery shopper scam involving fraudulent checks that appear to have been issued by New York State.

“In these tough economic times, many people could use some extra cash,” DiNapoli said. “But an offer of easy money is usually an offer you should refuse. No legitimate check from the State of New York would ever be used as part of a mystery shopper program. If you receive one of these fraudulent checks, please report it to your local law enforcement authorities.”

Here is how the scam works: The scammers send potential victims a letter telling them that they have been selected to participate in a paid consumer research program in their area as a mystery shopper. The letter is from a fictitious company representing itself as Waterloo Market Research with a New York mailing address.

The letter asks individuals to complete two assignments: The first assignment is to make purchases at stores such as Walmart, K-Mart, Home Depot and Sears for \$100 and fill out a report about their experience. The second assignment is to evaluate various banks and other money transferring agencies.

Included with the letter is a counterfeit New York State check for various amounts from \$3,500 to \$4,960 that bears a forged signature of Comptroller DiNapoli. The check is supposed to cover the money transfer, the shopper’s purchases and compensate the individual. The victim is directed to deposit the check into their bank account and then to immediately wire the bulk of the check proceeds to the scammers using Money Gram or Western Union.

Before the depositing bank has learned that the check is fake, the victim has already transferred the funds. Any money wired to the scammers cannot be retrieved.

Several other states have issued warnings about a similar scam.

Anyone with questions or concerns about this scam, should contact local law enforcement officials or the New York State Comptroller’s office at 518-474-4040.