

MEDIA RELEASE

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Con Artists Targeting Spanish-Speaking Senior Citizens in Phony Lottery Scams

South Gate, California: On July 29, 2009, South Gate Police Detectives arrested 4 people in connection with Latin Lottery scams. The scams typically involve teams of con artists claiming to have a winning California Lottery ticket, but first needing thousands of dollars in order to claim their prize. Suspects often approach females (though some males have been approached) between the ages of 45-90 and speak with the victims in Spanish in order to gain the victim's trust.

The South Gate Police Department has been working closely with the Long Beach Police Department, Los Angeles Police Department and local law enforcement in Northern California, Illinois and Florida. Latin Lottery Scammers are known to travel up and down the state, and across state lines to victimize Spanish-speaking people.

The Suspects are believe to vary their teams – sometimes using two male suspects, or two female suspects, but most often using a team comprised of one male and one female suspect. The two suspects pretend not to know one another, but in reality are working together to convince the potential victim. The Suspects typically are nicely dressed, very polite and generally speak to the potential victim in Spanish, in order to create a degree of familiarity and trust.

How the Fraudulent Scheme Works

Suspect #1 will walk up to the potential victim and ask for directions to a non-existent law firm, immigration office, or street address. Once the suspect gets the potential victim talking then they reveal a secret...they have a winning lottery ticket worth millions of dollars! A second suspect will then pretend to overhear what is being said and join in the conversation. The 2nd suspect often times pulls out a cell phone and offers to phone the California Lottery Commission to verify that this is in fact a winning lottery ticket. The 2nd Suspect may even let the potential victim listen in on the conversation, where a third (unseen) suspect confirms that yes; this is in fact a winning lottery ticket. The voice on the phone will then advise that they will need thousands of dollars in cash (or jewelry) for collateral in order to receive millions of dollars in prize money.

The second suspect will try to convince the potential victim that this is what they must do; they must each put in between \$5,000-\$30,000 and help the illegal alien receive their grand lottery prize. The suspects are often very patient and may detain a potential victim, trying to convince them, for several hours. Once the victim gets into the suspects' vehicle, the suspect's drive the victim to their bank or credit union (for the victim to withdraw thousands of dollars in cash) or to the victim's home (for the victim to retrieve any hidden cash or heirloom jewelry). If the Victim has no ready access to cash, the suspects may try to convince the victim to let them drive them to a local mall, to use their credit card to purchase expensive items (generally electronics or jewelry), that the suspects can later turn into cash.

Latin Lottery Scam artists such as those arrested by The South Gate Police Department are known to law enforcement to work throughout Los Angeles County, throughout the State of California and even throughout the United States and have defrauded thousands of people out of millions of dollars. In many cases, the victims wind up handing over their life savings or precious jewelry that has been in their family for generations or paying credit card payments on items they no longer possess. Too often the victims are humiliated by having been conned into giving total strangers thousands of dollars and may even refuse to tell family members or law enforcement that they've been victimized by con artists.

Detectives know that victims of financial scams such as the Latin Lottery Scam can take the loss very personally. There have been reports from other cities of some victims having been so distraught that they take their own life once they realize their life savings has been stolen from them.

South Gate Police Department Detectives would like to warn the public to beware of strangers approaching them and claiming to have a winning lottery ticket and in need of large amounts of cash or jewelry in order to claim their prize.

Investigators point out that the California Lottery

- 1). Does not require a person be a U.S. citizen in order to claim a lottery prize;
- 2). Never confirms over the phone that a ticket is a winner;
- 3). Never requires financial collateral in order for a prize to be claimed.

The best way to avoid becoming a Lottery scam victim is not to engage in any conversation with strangers who claim to have a winning lottery ticket. It's also a good idea never to get into a stranger's vehicle. And if anyone offers to double or even triple your money, just remember that any offer that sounds too good to be true probably is too good to be true.

If you or someone you know is approached by anyone in a Latin Lottery scam, immediately report it to your local law enforcement agency.

Anyone who believes they may have been a victim in the City of South Gate by Latin Lottery con artists, or recognizes any of the following individuals, is asked to call the South Gate Police Department at 323-563-5436.

Partial Gallery of Latin Lottery Scam Suspects



Luz Perez (in Custody by South Gate Police Department)



Raul Santana (in custody by South Gate Police Department)



Unknown Male Suspect #2 (DR#09-6706)