

## Filing A Consumer Complaint

If you are unable to resolve a dispute with a business, you may file a complaint by contacting the Consumer Protection Division with the Colorado Attorney General's Office.

To file a complaint, call the Colorado Consumer Line at: 1-800-222-4444 or go online at:

[www.ago.state.co.us](http://www.ago.state.co.us)

Click on the "Consumer Protection" link at the top.

## Helpful Resources

### AARP ElderWatch

1301 Pennsylvania, Suite 280, Denver, CO 80203

[www.aarpelderwatch.org](http://www.aarpelderwatch.org)

**AARP Colorado State Office:** 1-866-554-5376

**AARP National Office:** 1-888-OUR-AARP

**Colorado Coalition for Elder Rights  
and Adult Protection:** 1-800-773-1366

**Colorado Division of Securities:** 303-894-2320

**Colorado Senior Health Insurance**

**Assistance Program:** 1-800-544-9181

**Do-Not Call (Colorado):**

1-800-309-7041 ♦ [coloradonocall.com](http://coloradonocall.com)

**Do-Not Call (National)**

1-888-382-1222 ♦ [www.ftc.gov/donotcall](http://www.ftc.gov/donotcall)

**Federal Trade Commission ID Theft Hotline:**

1-877-IDTHEFT

**HUD Housing Counselors:** 1-800-569-4287

**Social Security Information:** 1-800-772-1213



Colorado Department of Law  
Office of the Attorney General

# Senior Fraud Alert

## Tips On How To Be A Smart Consumer



**John W. Suthers**  
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## A Message from John W. Suthers

Dear Fellow Coloradans:

As Attorney General, I am committed to protecting our citizens, especially Colorado's older citizens. This brochure outlines some of the more prevalent types of fraud targeting our seniors. To help you or your family members avoid consumer fraud, please use this brochure as a resource and refer to the helpful tips and warning signs. Together, we can hold scam artists and other criminals accountable and help make Colorado a safer state for citizens of every age.

Sincerely,

John W. Suthers

Colorado Attorney General



Attorney General Suthers meets with citizens

## Identity Theft

Identity theft is the fastest growing crime in America. Identity thieves seek out all sorts of personal information such as social security numbers, financial account information, and spending habits. They use that information to empty out existing bank accounts, run up huge charges on your credit cards, and even apply for new credit cards and loans in your name.

*To minimize the chances of becoming a victim of identity theft:*

- Never give out personal information over the phone unless you initiated the call.
- Shred all personal or financial documents you intend to discard before placing them in the trash (a "cross-cut" shredder is best).
- Never respond to e-mail or "pop-up" messages on your computer claiming some problem with a credit card, Internet, or other account. Promptly contact your real credit card company or ISP to verify that there are no problems with your account.

For more information on how to protect yourself from identity theft, please refer to the Attorney General's website ([www.ago.state.co.us](http://www.ago.state.co.us)), where you will find a link under "Hot Topics."



# How to be a smart consumer: Protecting yourself from fraud and theft

## Charitable Giving:

### Wise Philanthropy

Each year, millions of dollars are donated to charities across the country and while many are worthy causes, fraudulent charities also exist.

*Remember the following tips before donating:*

- Ask for the charity's address and registration number.
- Watch out for similar sounding names. Some phony charities use names that closely resemble those of legitimate organizations.
- Avoid cash gifts that can be lost or stolen. For security or tax-record purposes, it is always best to pay by check or credit card.
- Before you make a donation, check-out the charity on the Secretary of State's website ([www.sos.state.co.us](http://www.sos.state.co.us)) or with the BBB Wise Giving Alliance ([www.give.org](http://www.give.org)).
- Ask the solicitor what percent of your donation will go to the charity.

### Foreign Lotteries

Federal law makes all foreign lotteries and sweepstakes illegal. Yet, these types of scams are common. Foreign lottery telemarketers are experts at building consumer trust. If you become involved with a foreign lottery, your name will be placed on a list that fraudulent telemarketers buy and sell. To prevent being targeted, ignore all mail and phone solicitations for foreign lottery promotions.

## Sweepstake Scams

Among the more common fraudulent activities targeting senior citizens are scams that claim that you have won a cash award or some other prize.

### Never Pay to Win

Legitimate sweepstakes do not require you to pay any fees, shipping or taxes to receive a prize.

### Never Give out Credit Card Numbers

Legitimate sweepstakes companies will not need your credit card number "to secure your prize" or "for verification." **Protect your personal information!**

### When in Doubt, Investigate the Company

Check with your local BBB or call the Attorney General's Office to make sure that this company has a good track record. Be wary of a company whose only address is a post office box.

## Investment Scams

*Always do your research before investing and remember the following advice:*

- Words like "guarantee," "high return," "limited offer," or "as safe as a C.D." may be a red flag. No financial investment is "risk free" and a high rate of return means greater risk.
- Be wary of promises of quick profits, offers to share "inside" information, and pressure to invest before you have an opportunity to investigate.
- For more information about a company and the people behind it, contact the Colorado Division of Securities at: (303) 894-2320 or online at: [www.dora.state.co.us/securities](http://www.dora.state.co.us/securities).

## Protecting Your Home

Home improvement scams are consistently rated a top consumer problem. Ask your friends and relatives for recommendations before selecting a contractor.

*Always have a written, signed contract before any work is done on your home, which includes the following:*

- Name, address and phone number of the bidding contractor;
- A complete description of the work to be done and the materials to be used;
- A provision requiring written approval for any changes;
- A guarantee as well as a start and completion date;
- A full description of the cost of the job, disclosure of payment terms, and financing costs;
- Your signature as well as the contractor's signature.



Before signing any contract, make sure the builder or contractor uses licensed electricians and plumbers. Never hire a contractor who does not provide workers' compensation coverage for all their employees.

## Common Warning Signs of Home-Improvement Scams

- The builder or contractor asks you to get the required permits;
- The contractor has out-of-state license plates;
- They ask you to pay the full amount of the project up-front;

- A contractor comes to your home and claims to have just finished a project that he has left-over materials from and therefore can give you a bargain price;
- The contractor uses a post office box with no street address.

## Mortgage and Foreclosure Fraud

*To avoid becoming a victim of a mortgage or foreclosure fraud, keep in mind the following tips:*

- Don't sign any documents until you have had time to review them carefully.
- Contact a HUD-approved housing counselor or a private attorney to help you review and understand the documents.
- Remember - any kind of "deed" (warranty deed or quit claim deed) means you are selling your home. Be especially careful of programs that lease your home back to you with a promise that you can repurchase it at a later date.
- If you are having trouble meeting your mortgage, try contacting your lender to explain your financial situation and work out a payment plan.
- To avoid predatory lending, be suspicious of anyone who contacts you first or offers "bargain loans" or "easy credit."