

# CONSUMER ADVISORY

April 2007

By Attorney General Tom Miller

## Warning: Sweepstakes Mail Threatens Older Iowans

The Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division is advising Iowans to be wary of sweepstakes mailings that induce older Iowans to believe — falsely — that they may be close to winning a major sweepstakes prize, and that their chances of winning may go up if they order more merchandise or magazines.

According to the Attorney General's Office, the disturbing result of these mistaken beliefs is that each year many hundreds if not thousands of older Iowans send more than \$1,000 apiece to sweepstakes promoters for magazines and merchandise in response to sweepstakes mailings. Many Iowans receive multiple sweepstakes solicitations *each week*, reply to them, and make purchases repeatedly in pursuit of the sweepstakes prize. For some elderly Iowans, spending in one year may exceed \$5,000.

### To older Iowans, and all Iowans: Watch out for sweepstakes pitfalls:

- By law, sweepstakes prizes cannot be awarded on the basis of whether you purchased merchandise. Don't buy products just to win a huge sweepstakes prize! ***Buying does NOT increase your chance of winning.***
- Don't believe "personalized" letters making it seem like company representatives are tracking YOUR progress in the sweepstakes, that they want YOU to win, and that YOU are close to winning. ***Thousands of people receive similar letters.***

### To relatives, friends and care-givers: Watch for warning signs, and be ready to act:

- Watch for danger signs -- the older Iowan receiving very frequent sweepstakes solicitations, purchasing a large volume of magazines or products (often left unopened or unused), or having a hard time paying expenses because of funds being drained. Contact the Attorney General's Office, which is looking into this situation and can suggest action you can take -- including how to remove the older Iowan from the sweepstakes promoters' lists.

A related warning for all: Never cash a check you receive in the mail and wire the money for "taxes" or "fees" to collect a big sweepstakes or lottery prize. *The check will be counterfeit* and bounce — you will lose your money and you won't get any prize!

To file a complaint, contact the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division, Hoover Bldg., Des Moines, Iowa 50319. Call 515-281-5926, or 888-777-4590 (toll-free.) The web site is: [www.iowaAttorneyGeneral.org](http://www.iowaAttorneyGeneral.org) (click on "protecting consumers.")