

Texas Lottery Commission Press Release - July 30, 2003

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Texas Lottery Commission Warns Metroplex Area That Latin *Lotto* Scam Still Active

(Austin, July 30) - Texas Lottery Commission Executive Director Reagan E. Greer is warning the public that the Latin *Lotto* scam is still active in the Metroplex area.

"Our Security staff met with the latest victim at the Dallas Claim Center just yesterday," said Greer. "She was scammed out of \$6,000 by con artists using the same tactics we've come to recognize as the 'Latin *Lotto* Scam.' "

Since the scam was first reported in Texas about four years ago, victims have lost more than \$3 million. It has been called the "Latin *Lotto* Scam" since law enforcement identified the ring of perpetrators as coming from Latin America. The scam has been reported in Florida and California, and law enforcement intelligence indicates that the same tactics and sometimes the same perpetrators are involved in each state.

The scam is usually perpetrated by at least three people and appears to target elderly Hispanics.

The first person approaches the target and claims to have a winning Texas Lottery ticket that he cannot cash in because he is not a U.S. resident and doesn't have the money to pay the taxes on the prize upfront. The victim is asked for cash and a ride to the claim center, in exchange for a share of the prize.

During this exchange, a second person approaches and appears to overhear the conversation.

The second person, who is part of the scam, wants in on the deal, but asks for proof that the ticket is real before putting in any money.

The first perpetrator then offers to call the Lottery. That call is answered by another member of the scam who pretends to be an employee of the Texas Lottery and confirms that the ticket is a winner.

"If you are approached by someone with this drivel, you need to get away from them as soon as possible and call your local law enforcement agency," Greer said.

"The Texas Lottery never requires a player to pay money upfront to claim a prize," he said. "And there's no restriction on someone who is not a U.S. citizen from claiming a prize. Either one of those statements is your first clue that this is a scam."

Greer noted that the Lottery also doesn't confirm that a ticket is a winner over the phone.

Greer said the 68-year-old Hispanic woman was approached at a Wal-Mart in the Spring Valley and Central Expressway area, and called the Claim Center when the con artists left her "holding the bag."

"This was a classic case of the Latin *Lotto* scam," explained Greer. "Previous scams also started at very public places, such as grocery stores and home improvement centers."

Greer said that once they had her money, and were supposedly driving to the Lottery Claim Center, one of the con artists said he had to use the restroom. The victim was left with what she thought was her cash. When the con artists didn't re-appear, she opened the bag and saw that what she was holding was a bunch of cut up newspapers, shaped like dollar bills.

"Just a year ago, the Texas Lottery Commission implemented a public awareness campaign, and we saw incidents of the Latin

Lotto scam die out," Greer explained. "But this incident shows that they're at it again, and I urge people - please – don't fall for it."

Incidents of the Latin *Lotto* scam have been reported recently in Lubbock. Previous cases have been reported in Hempstead, Navasota, Corpus Christi, El Paso, Laredo, San Marcos, Amarillo, New Braunfels and Austin, with 200 reported in Houston alone.

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Who: Reagan E. Greer, Executive Director, Texas Lottery Commission

What: Media Availability

When: Thursday, July 31, 2003, from 3:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Where: Wyndham Arlington 1500 Convention Center Drive Arlington, TX 817-261-8200