

Texas Lottery Commission Press Release - August 27, 2003

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## Latin Lotto Scam Hits San Angelo

(Austin, August 27) - Texas Lottery Commission Executive Director Reagan E. Greer is warning the public that another incident of the Latin *Lotto* scam hit San Angelo this week. A couple in their late '50s has become the latest victims. The incident took place Tuesday in the parking lot of a hardware store on the southwest side of San Angelo.

"Everyone in the San Angelo and West Texas area should be aware that these con artists using phony lottery tickets are back again and targeting elderly people with this scam," said Greer. "The latest victims this week were scammed out of \$500 by con artists using the same tactics we've come to recognize as the 'Latin *Lotto* Scam.'"

Greer said the couple was approached in the hardware store parking lot. After the con artists disappeared with their money, the victims contacted the San Angelo Police Department.

A Garland woman was scammed out of \$6,000 on July 30 while shopping at a Dallas-area shopping center. A Bastrop woman lost \$2,000 on August 11 and a Houston victim was scammed out of \$5,000 earlier this month. More than 200 cases were reported in Houston last year.

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 Lottery 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 scheme, 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.

"This week's incident is 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.

"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."

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