

Texas Lottery Commission Press Release - August 7, 2003

Contact:

Leticia Vásquez, 512-344-5208

Karen Kalergis, 512-344-5436

## **Texas Lottery Commission Warns Houston That Latin Lotto Scam Still Active**

(Austin, August 7) - Texas Lottery Commission Executive Director Reagan E. Greer is warning the public that another incident of the Latin Lotto scam recently occurred in the Houston area.

"Everyone in Houston should be aware that con artists using phony lottery tickets are back in town and targeting elderly people with this scam," said Greer. "The latest victim in Houston was scammed out of \$5,000 on Tuesday by con artists using the same tactics we've come to recognize as the 'Latin Lotto Scam.'"

A Garland woman was scammed out of \$6,000 last week while shopping at a Dallas-area shopping center, and other cases have been reported in Lubbock. 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.

Greer said the 67-year-old Hispanic woman was approached at the Home Depot at I-45 and Woodridge Drive. She contacted police after the con artists disappeared with her money.

"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.

"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.