

Media Release



Government of South Australia

Office of Consumer and
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New taskforce warning on scams Delete it! Hang up! Destroy it!

Eighteen agencies across Australia and New Zealand have joined forces to combat consumer fraud, warning consumers about the scams that affect thousands of Australians every year. The Australasian Consumer Taskforce launched a four-week campaign today to help people protect themselves from becoming the next victim.

Crimes involving fraud is estimated to cost Australia at least \$5.88 billion each year with a proportion of this amount affecting consumers. The Taskforce warns that the best protection against scammers is to hit the delete key, hang up, or throw it in the bin.

Commissioner for Consumer Affairs, Mark Bodycoat said, "As a group of regulators, advocates, educators and consumer protection agencies we see the devastating effects which scams have on people. Our combined experience and knowledge has shown that the best way of combating consumer fraud is to educate and change the behaviour of people before it becomes a problem."

"Agencies across Australia receive thousands of complaints, and often calls for help, each year about scams received by mail, telephone and email. Our key message is to 'delete it, hang up and destroy it'. Consumers are their own best defence, and should always err on the side of caution."

The Taskforce, chaired by Deputy Chair of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, Louise Sylvan, is working on outreach strategies, prevention strategies and research.

"Scammers are becoming ever-more sophisticated and clever in the way they target people. We need consumers to resist these often ingenious scams and refuse to respond," said Mr Bodycoat.

The top scams reported to the Office of Consumer and Business Affairs (OCBA) in 2005 include:

- David Rhodes chain letter
- Nigerian scam
- Overseas lotteries
- False billing (via fax or telephone contact)
- Fraudulent bank emails

Scams are a global problem with many emanating from overseas, making it difficult to take action. Consumers who respond to these scams nearly always lose their money, never to see it again.

"There are thousands of scams that promise much and deliver nothing. The key message for consumers is 'If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is'."

To report a suspected scam contact OCBA on 8204 9777 (or 131 882 for regional callers). A list of scams is available at www.ocba.sa.gov.au or www.scamwatch.gov.au

Background

As part of a whole of Government approach to combat consumer fraud and scams targeted at consumers, the Australasian Consumer Fraud Taskforce was established in March 2005 and comprises 18 government regulatory agencies and departments in Australia and New Zealand.

Agencies participating in the Taskforce are:

Australian Government:

Attorney General's Department
Australian Bureau of Statistics
Australian Communications and Media Authority
Australian Competition & Consumer Commission
Australian Federal Police (represented by the Australian High Tech Crime Centre)
Australian Institute of Criminology
Australian Securities & Investment Commission
Department of Communications, Information Technology & the Arts

New Zealand Government:

NZ Commerce Commission; Ministry of Consumer Affairs

State and Territory Governments:

Australian Capital Territory – Office of Fair Trading
Consumer Affairs Victoria
New South Wales – Office of Fair Trading
Northern Territory – Department of Justice
Queensland – Department of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development
South Australia – Office of Consumer & Business Affairs
Tasmania – Office of Consumer Affairs & Fair Trading
Western Australia – Department of Consumer & Employment Protection.