

The Con Game

Pointers on the game. The best bet for winning the con game is to recognize the swindler's moves. A few steps that should tip you off right away:



- Somebody offers you something for nothing or at a surprisingly low price.
- A stranger asks you about your personal finances.
- You are asked to pay large sums in cash.
- Someone asks you to help in a "secret plan."
- A stranger asks you to withdraw your bank savings in cash.

It may not be quite as simple as that, though.

Swindlers come in many disguises and they're creative. Be alert. You have to recognize them and blow the whistle before they take your money.



The "Pigeon Drop"

You are waiting for the bus. A woman (it could also be a man) starts a friendly conversation. She says she's just found a large sum of money on her way from work. What should she do with it? Maybe her "boss" can suggest something.

She leaves to check and comes back a few minutes later. Her "boss" said to divide the money, but first, each of you must put up some "good faith" money. Once you hand over your share, though, you'll never see it or this con artist again.



The "Bank Examiner"

Another time, a man (it could be a woman) in conservative business clothes, tells you he is a bank official or FBI agent and needs your help to catch a dishonest teller. All you have to do is withdraw your savings and give the money to him so he can check the serial numbers. If you do, you've been "stung." A real bank official would never ask you to withdraw your money.



Other Frauds

Mail Fraud:

- Fake "Contest Winner"
- "Missing Heirs"
- Unsolicited Merchandise

Advertising Fraud:

- "Bait and Switch"
- Other Misleading "Come-ons."

Charity Fraud:

Always check out a charity before making donations.

Land Fraud:

Never buy anything sight unseen!

Phone Coin and Gem Sales

Medical and Health Fraud:

Follow your doctor's advice. Use only medical facilities and products recommended by your doctor or health clinic.

What to Do if You've Been Conned...

The con artist can be pretty persuasive. Sometimes you might not know you've been cheated until it's too late.

So what do you do? Lots of people don't do anything. They're too embarrassed to admit they were duped. Or they blame themselves. Or they think the authorities don't want to hear about a little con game.

If you don't report fraud, you're only helping the crooks. That's just what they want. Don't play into their hands a second time! Instead contact:

- **Your Local Law Enforcement Agency**
- **Your Local District Attorney**
- **The Better Business Bureau or**
- **The Chamber of Commerce**

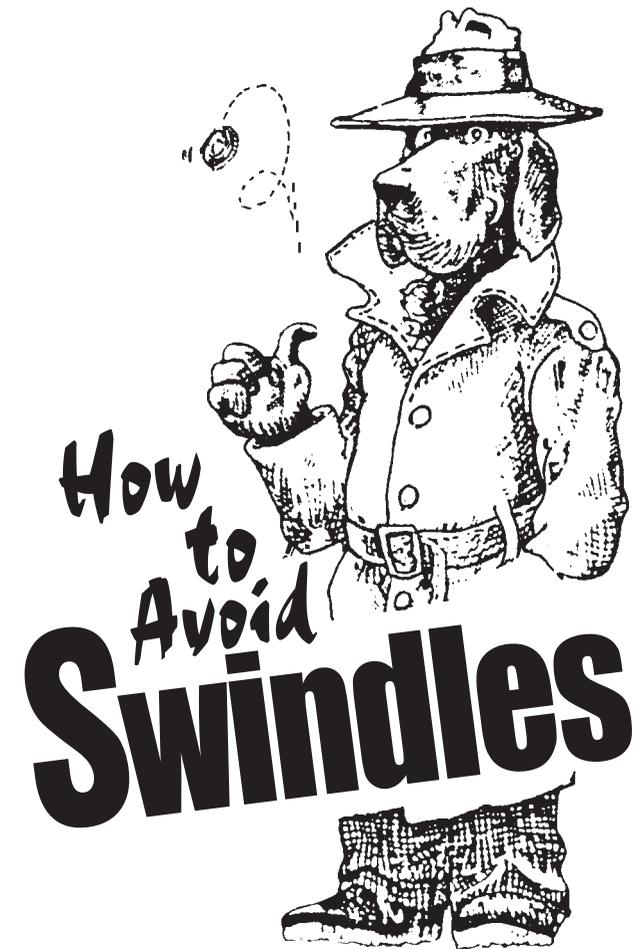
If you are a victim of fraud, these people want to know about it.

Courtesy of
Office of Criminal Justice Planning
1130 K Street Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 324-9100

Provided by:
Torrance Police Department
John J. Neu
Chief of Police
310/328-3456

Community Affairs
310/618-6391 or 310/618-6392

3300 Civic Center Drive
Torrance, CA 90503



**Help McGruff
take a bite out of
CRIME
Torrance Police Department**

Avoiding Swindles



Con games — swindles. Most of us think we would be the last people in the world to be tricked into handing over our hard-earned money for deals that in retrospect are obviously phony.

But confidence artists are experts in human psychology and behavior. They know how to win over your confidence with their smooth talking and self-assured manner. Unless you are careful you may find yourself turning over cash or buying worthless merchandise. You won't be able to recognize a con by the way he or she looks, but you can be on the lookout for some of their "pitches."

Here are good rules to follow all the time — whether or not you suspect a fraud:

- Don't believe something for nothing offers. You get what you pay for.
- Be suspicious of high-pressure sales efforts.
- Take your time. Think about the deal before you part with your money.
- Get all agreements in writing. Insist that agreements are in "plain English" not "legalese."
- Read all contracts and agreements before signing. Have a lawyer examine all major contracts.
- Compare services, prices, and credit offers before agreeing to deal. Ask friends what their experiences have been with the firm or service in question.
- Never turn over large sums of cash to anyone, especially a stranger, no matter how promising the deal looks.
- Do not hesitate to check the credentials of anyone who comes to your door.
- Report all suspicious offers to the police immediately, before the swindler leaves town in search of other victims.

Fraud artists frequently rely on the same old tricks. You'll find that you may even be familiar with some of them. The list that follows includes some of the more common frauds. Don't be surprised after you've been conned.

Watch out for these frauds:

Home Improvement and Repair Frauds

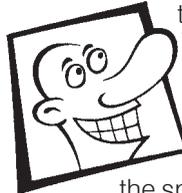
Home repairs and improvements can be costly. So watch out if somebody offers to do an expensive job for an unusually low price. Or if a firm offers to make a "free" inspection. Or if the workers just "happened to be in the neighborhood."

These are the favorite tricks of dishonest home repair firms. Some offer a price you just can't resist. Once you sign the contract, you learn why: they never deliver the service! Others send door-to-door inspectors to do free roof, termite or furnace inspections. You can bet these "free" inspections will turn up plenty of expensive repairs. Some fly-by-night companies will offer to do the work on the spot. When they leave, you may be left with a large bill and a faulty repair job.

Other repair frauds are simple to execute but difficult to detect. Some crooked repair people don't fix the problem but they charge you anyway. Some use inferior parts. Others charge you for work that you didn't expect. Some even do "insurance" work — they'll repair one thing but make sure that something else will soon go wrong.

To avoid home improvement and repair frauds, try the following:

- Don't try to diagnose the problem yourself unless you're an expert. The mechanic may take your advice, even if it's wrong. If you do know exactly what the problem is, don't tell the mechanics. Wait and see



your diagnosis. That way you'll know whether needless repairs are suggested.

- Try to get several detailed written estimates before any work is done. Compare job descriptions and materials to be used. Be sure to ask if there is a charge for an estimate.
- Ask for the old parts to make sure that replacements were really installed.
- Make sure you get a guarantee on any work that's done.
- Before you pay, make sure the work was done. Plug in the refrigerator. Test the TV.
- Check the identification of all "inspectors."
- Payby check — never with cash. Also, in order to insure that the job is satisfactorily completed, arrange to make installment payments — one-third at the beginning of the job, one-third when the work is nearly completed, and one-third after the job is done.

Investment Frauds



There are dozens of different investment frauds. Sometimes people are offered the "chance of a lifetime" to invest in a promising new company. The swindler takes the investor's money and quietly goes out of business. Another type of investment fraud is the "pyramid franchise." The investor buys a dealership for hundreds or thousands of dollars, and recruits other distributors or salespersons. Eventually, there are hundreds of distributors, but no one to sell the merchandise. Those at the top make lots of money before the pyramid collapses, leaving the individual investors without their cash.

Watch for these Warning Signs:

- High-pressure telephone sales efforts.
- The investment seems too good to be true.

- The emphasis is on setting up dealerships rather than selling a product.
- Potential investors are not encouraged (or allowed) to contact other investors.
- The promoter does not offer to "buy back" any unsold merchandise.
- You get a large quick return on the money you gave to a promoter. You may be the "butt" for a "Ponzi scheme."



Door-to-Door Sales

"Small Monthly Payments!"

Used to disguise the total cost of the item, which is usually outrageous. The vacuum cleaner you buy for "only" \$10 a month for four years will cost you \$480.

"Nothing Like It in the Stores!"

True. The vacuum cleaners in the stores are probably of better quality and come with a better warranty.

"Won't Find This Price Qnywhere!"

True. The prices in the stores are probably lower.

"Easy Credit!"

True. They don't care what your credit rating looks like. Once you sign for the purchase, paying for it is your problem. Be wary of "low monthly payments." Find out the total amount you'll pay over the life of the loan. Then subtract the actual cost of the item itself. The difference is what you'll pay in interest. Your bank, credit union or local legal aid society can tell you if the interest rate is fair.

California law provides for a "Three-Day Cooling Off Period" for sales over \$25 made in the home. You have three days in which you may cancel the contract and receive back any down payment with no penalties. A cancellation form must be included with your contract.

If you follow these tips, you'll make things hard for the swindler. And you could save yourself a lot of money...