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PHONY LOTTERY PRIZE NOTICES

BISMARCK – Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem warns that consumers across the country are being tricked by phony e-mails and letters, supposedly from state Lottery offices, which claim to be prize notifications for Powerball, Hot Lotto and other multi-state games. The recipient is told that fees and taxes must be paid before the multi-million dollar prize can be paid out. The scam appears to be recycled from older “foreign lottery” scams, but uses the names of legitimate, state-run lotteries.

“The North Dakota Lottery was contacted by an Ohio woman who had wired ‘lottery fees’ of more than \$600 to an overseas account after she received an e-mail supposedly from the North Dakota Lottery claiming she had won the January 6th Hot Lotto. The Lottery had to inform her she was the victim of a scam,” said Stenehjem.

“The North Dakota Lottery does not contact prize winners because we do not know who the winners are until they come forward with the winning ticket. And, no legitimate lottery requires a prize winner to pay fees or taxes up front in order to receive the prize,” said Chuck Keller, director of the North Dakota Lottery.

The Attorney General’s office suggests consumers call the Consumer Protection division before sending any money in response to these types of notices, and offered the following tips:

- Don’t be fooled by e-mails or letters claiming you have won a prize in a contest or lottery you don’t remember entering. If you didn’t buy a ticket, you cannot win a prize. Cyber-lotteries, claiming to have selected the winner’s e-mail address at random, are scams.
- Never send or wire any money – for fees, taxes, or customs – before you receive the prize. Legitimate contests and lotteries do not make winners pay anything out of pocket in order to collect the prize. And the US Government does not collect taxes or other fees before the winner receives the prize.
- Scam artists often include instructions not to tell anyone about the prize, which is another tip-off that the prize money does not exist.
- Foreign lotteries are illegal in the United States. Entering a foreign lottery from the United States violates federal law.

Consumers can find information about winning lottery numbers and prizes from the North Dakota Lottery website, at: <http://www.lottery.nd.gov/>. For information about lottery and other consumer scams, contact the Consumer Protection division, toll-free at 1-800-472-2600 or online at: www.ag.nd.gov.

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