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Fraudulent Work-at-Home Funds Transfer Agent Schemes

The Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation is warning consumers to be on the outlook for work-at-home schemes that recruit individuals to receive and transmit unauthorized electronic funds transfers (EFTs) from deposit accounts to individuals overseas. These funds transfer agents, often referred to as “money mules” are generally solicited by criminals who have gained unauthorized access to the online deposit account of a business or consumer. Typically, the criminal will originate an unauthorized EFT from the victim’s account to a money mule’s deposit account. The money mule is then instructed to quickly withdraw the funds and wire them overseas after deducting a commission (usually eight to ten percent).

Money mule schemes come in many different forms, but most involve receiving unauthorized EFTs into a deposit account and then withdrawing the money or forwarding it on to another party via EFT. The following are common scenarios:

- Online job posting Web sites are used by criminals to lure individuals seeking employment with flexible work hours that can be performed at home.
- Advance fee scams promising large monetary rewards for acting as a financial intermediary can entice individuals to participate in such activity.
- Mystery shopping jobs may be used that require the employee to assess the performance of money service businesses by completing EFTs and then evaluating the service using customer satisfaction forms.
- Social networking sites may be used to recruit individuals to act as money mules.
- Some hesitant or skeptical money mules have been intimidated, harassed and even threatened by their criminal employers to process the EFTs quickly and with secrecy.

Money mule activity is essentially laundering money that has been stolen from businesses or consumers. The personal identifiable information provided by the money mule might later be used by criminals to commit identity theft or account takeover. Money mules also end up being the person the money trail generally leads back to during subsequent investigations. So don’t be surprised to you find yourself being visited by authorities.

Bottom line, there are many work at home scams and schemes out there, particularly on the Internet. Consumers need to be leery of any offer that sounds too good to be true. Additionally, consumers need to do their research first on any company, and visit the Better Business Bureau before starting any work at home business.