



Investor Alert

Tips to Avoid Holiday Financial Fraud

Scammers don't take time off for the holidays, so the Ohio Division of Securities is cautioning investors to not let the spirit of giving lead them into risky investment schemes.

Financial fraud is a year-round problem, however it increases during the holidays when some consumers face a financial crunch with increased expenses from holiday gifts and travel, or may be considering their year-end investments or tax-savings opportunities. Ohioans should be especially vigilant in protecting their assets from those promoting investment opportunities online, by telephone or mail, and in-person.

Fraud especially touches seniors, many of whom are alone for the holidays and who may be invited to a free holiday lunch or dinner investment seminar. Scammers prey on the lonely, especially the elderly, who may be more willing to attend a seminar where they're fed not only a free meal but also a hard sales pitch.

Here are four things investors can do to protect themselves and their money from scammers:

- Never give your Social Security number, date of birth or credit card numbers in response to unsolicited e-mail messages or "cold callers" over the phone.
- Don't make quick investment decisions based on sales pitches that refer to "great deals that will be offered for only a short time" or those that offer unreasonable rates of return.
- Even though the holidays are busy and everyone is pressed for time, investors should find the time to research any investment opportunity – and those who offer them – before even considering investing their hard-earned money.
- Before investing any money, call the Ohio Division of Securities to learn more about the salesperson and the investment product being offered for sale.

Need a New Year's Resolution? Here are four to consider:

- Resolve to investigate before you invest.
- Resolve to make safe investing a family affair.
- Resolve to check out your broker or investment adviser before investing.
- Resolve to fight fraud; make fraud detection part of your routine.

The Bottom Line

To avoid any potential financial fraud, call the Ohio Division of Securities' Investor Protection Hotline at 877-683-7841. Before investing money with anyone, consumers should ask:

- Is the brokerage firm and salesperson licensed to sell securities in Ohio?
- Have any enforcement actions been taken against them?
- Has the security been properly registered with the Division of Securities?