



Office Supply Scams

Several businesses recently complained to the Office of the Attorney General about invoices they received for office supplies that were never ordered, including paper, toner cartridges and other office products.

Business owners should be aware that scam artists sometimes send fraudulent billing invoices to companies of all sizes, hoping that the accounting department will simply pay the bill. Crooks count on the business's failure to confirm that a purchase order was issued or that goods actually arrived.

Office supply schemes can take multiple forms. In one variation, the scam artist simply sends an invoice without ever delivering any products. Other thieves send merchandise that the business did not order and charge a price that dramatically exceeds what the same supplies would cost at a local retailer. If the invoices are unpaid, scammers try to intimidate the businesses with threatening telephone calls and letters.

Most office supply scammers are based in other states, so Texas businesses can only communicate with them by telephone or e-mail. Businesses that attempt to question the invoices are often met with vague statements claiming that "someone" at the company ordered the supplies.

By law, businesses that receive unordered merchandise are under no obligation to pay to return the unwanted products. Generally, these items can be considered a gift. Otherwise, the retailer that sent the merchandise must pay to retrieve it within a reasonable period of time at no expense to the business. A scam artist will seldom bother to do so.

Businesses should consider alerting **all** employees about office supply scams, not just those who work in accounting and billing departments. Some scammers are known to dial random numbers throughout a business until they find an unsuspecting employee who will "accept" the unordered merchandise. According to some reports, employees have also been persuaded to fill out sweepstakes forms without realizing that the fine print committed their company to buy unwanted, overpriced supplies.

Businesses that receive fraudulent invoices or unordered supplies, or are subjected to bogus collection threats or any other scam should file a complaint with the OAG Consumer Protection Division by calling (800) 252-8011 or visiting the OAG Web site at www.oag.state.tx.us.

Greg Abbott, Attorney General of Texas

**WRITE TO: Greg Abbott, Office of the Attorney General, PO Box 12548,
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