

FRAUD ALERT **Gift Cards**

As the 2018 holiday season approaches, we want to warn consumers to think twice before purchasing gift cards or gift certificates as a holiday gift. This year big box stores are closing at record rates across the country. Bankruptcies for many retailers is becoming more common. If a business files bankruptcy it's a real possibility that any issued gift card or gift certificate will be rendered useless, even if the business does not completely close. In some cases, it does not have to honor your purchase of a gift card depending on the terms and type of bankruptcy protection they file. If you must give a gift card or a gift certificate, before you make the purchase, please consider that there is always the possibility that the business may close down. Also, be aware of any fees associated with the card that may slowly deplete the money on the gift card. Gift cards can certainly be a convenient gift but nothing works as well as good old-fashioned cash! It may seem impersonal but in today's environment it may be financially wise.

You do have some protection and possible recourse through The Pennsylvania Department of Treasury Unclaimed Property Division however, many businesses that do close are unaware that they are required to send any unused gift certificate money back to the state. It can be a cumbersome process to get your money back.

Gift Card Regulations from The Pennsylvania Department of Treasury

- Gift cards may not expire for 5 years after the date of issuance, according to the PA Treasury Dept.
- Gift card issuers may charge an inactivity fee if the card has not been used within 12 months. The inactivity fee must be disclosed.
- Pennsylvania's Unclaimed Property Law requires gift certificates/cards to be reported as unclaimed property if they contain an expiration date and/or any fees.

Consumers should:

1. Before purchasing a gift card check for an expiration date as well as whether they will incur any fees or lose value on the card if it is not used for a period of time.
2. Inform the card issuer if a gift card is lost or stolen. If you made a copy or wrote down the card number and information, the card issuer may be able to deactivate the old card and reissue a new one.
3. Purchase gift cards from reputable retailers. BEWARE: Gift cards purchased through some online auction sites may not be legitimate or may have been obtained through fraudulent means.

[Bucks County Crimes Against Older Adults Task Force](#)

Bucks County District Attorney's Office
215-348-6344
Bucks County Area Agency on Aging
215-348-0510
Bucks County Coroner's Office
215-348-3852
Network of Victim Assistance (NOVA)
1-800-675-6900

A Woman's Place (AWP)
1-800-220-8116
Bucks County Office of Consumer Protection
215-348-6060
Bucks County Register of Wills
215-348-6265

www.crimesagainstolderadultsbucks.org 24 - HOUR HOTLINE: 1-800-490-8505