

## “Winners” Lose Big to Imposters Posing as Publishers Clearing House

Submitted by Kelvin H. Collins, President/CEO, Better Business Bureau

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**Y**es, Publishers Clearing House impostors are back at it again. They never really left, but consumers are again hearing, “You’ve won – a new car! Millions of dollars! Cash for life!” The crazy thing is, you don’t even recall entering the contest. Con artists continually pose as Publishers Clearing House and other sweepstakes and lottery companies to play on our desire to “get rich quick.” Here’s how the scam works. You receive a phone call, text message, email, social media message, or even a letter in the mail claiming you’ve won millions of dollars or another high-value prize through Publishers Clearing House. The correspondence seems real. It’s complete with official seals and contact information for the contest organizer. It typically lists affiliation with legitimate organizations, such as the Better Business Bureau, the IRS, the FTC, and major retailers.

The catch? You are responsible for paying shipping and handling, insurance, taxes, and other fees before you can claim your prize. Scammers may pressure you to pay quickly, claiming that if the fees aren’t paid in this specific way and right on time, you’ll forfeit your prize money.

A few thousand dollars may not sound like much compared to the millions you’ve just won. However, con artists keep asking you, the “lucky winner,” to pay again and again. But it’s never enough to get the funds transferred. Of course, in the end, your prize money never existed.

The real Publishers Clearing House is a BBB Accredited Business with a good rating, and it never asks people to pay upfront fees for anything. The company is frequently mimicked by scammers because of its reputation for real prizes.

### Tips to avoid these scams:

- Reach out to Publishers Clearing House: If you are contacted by a scammer impersonating PCH, report it by calling [\(800\) 392-4190](tel:8003924190). You can find more information from Publishers Clearing House at [info.pch.com/fraud-protection](http://info.pch.com/fraud-protection).
- Be wary of unsolicited correspondence. If you receive a notice out of the blue and can’t recall entering the contest, it’s likely a scam. Look for typos and misspellings. They are tell-tale signs of a scam.
- Never pay fees to claim a prize. You should never have to pay any fees up front before receiving winnings. Not even taxes.
- Never wire money or use prepaid debit/gift cards. If you are asked to use these transfer methods to get a prize or any other large sum of money, that is a major red flag. It’s difficult to track these types of transactions, so you will have little to no way of getting your money back.
- You have to give personal information. Anytime someone tries to get your bank account number, Social Security number, or other sensitive information, that should be an automatic red flag. There is also no need to access financial information, like a credit card number in response to a sweepstakes promotion.
- Don’t fall for ‘too-good-to-be-true’ prizes. When you are offered a large sum of money, there is always a catch. Scammers attempt to make it sound easy to claim your prize. The reality is that it is very unlikely that someone will give away large sums of money with no strings attached.
- Keep track of any contests you enter. You can’t win a contest you didn’t enter. If you often enter contests and sweepstakes, keep track of them and check them out thoroughly. This will help you spot a fake.

You can find more information on spotting a Publisher Clearing House scam on their website’s fraud information center at [info.pch.com](http://info.pch.com).

To learn more about sweepstakes scams and how they work, see BBB’s study on these scams at [BBB.org/ScamStudies](http://BBB.org/ScamStudies). If you’ve been the victim of a scam, please report it to [www.BBB.org/ScamTracker](http://www.BBB.org/ScamTracker). By sharing your experience, you can help others avoid falling victim to similar scams.

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*Kelvin Collins is president & CEO of the Better Business Bureau serving the Fall Line Corridor, serving 77 counties in East Alabama, West Georgia, Southwest Georgia, Central Georgia, East Georgia, and Western South Carolina. This tips column is provided through the local BBB and the International Association of Better Business Bureaus (IABBB). The Better Business Bureau sets standards for ethical business behavior, monitors compliance and helps consumers identify trustworthy businesses. Questions or complaints about a specific company or charity should be referred directly to the BBB at Phone: [1-800-763-4222](tel:18007634222), Web site: [BBB.org](http://BBB.org) or E-mail: [info@centralgeorgia.bbb.org](mailto:info@centralgeorgia.bbb.org).*

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