



# South Carolina Department of Insurance

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## Media Release

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**For Immediate Release**

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### **South Carolina Department of Insurance Warns of Identity Thieves Targeting Annuities and Annuity Recipients**

The South Carolina Department of Insurance has recently become aware of a scheme to defraud consumers who own various types of annuity policies. These instances occurred when the identity thief -- posing as the consumer -- asks the issuing annuity insurance company to make a distribution or payment from the annuity without the knowledge of the true consumer. The thieves are able to carry out this plan by using a combination of fraudulently obtained personal information about the consumer, such as account numbers, dates of birth, Social Security numbers, names and addresses of relatives, among other items.

“South Carolinians need to be vigilant to ensure they are safeguarding their personal and private information against potential security breaches”, said Ray Farmer, Director of the South Carolina Department of Insurance. “Consumers should closely monitor **all of their accounts**, paying special attention to correspondence about their policies and be on the lookout for unauthorized withdrawals, sudden account changes or beneficiary changes. We’ve seen this annuity scheme carried out in several other states. Our concern is that South Carolinians may be vulnerable to this type of criminal activity as well.”

Like other investments, the Department reminds consumers of the importance of protecting and safeguarding their personal and financial information against identity theft and fraudulent activity. “It is simply not enough to be aware that such frauds and scams occur -- consumers must take extra steps to protect their sensitive personal information and data”, said Director Farmer.

Identity thieves can gain access to information from a variety of places, including our mailboxes, home doorsteps, trash disposal bins (both at home or at worksites), public trash receptacles, or by matching public records with personal information gathered from social media sites. Often, the information is obtained through an innocent sounding phone call or a solicitous email or text message. Consumers are at greater risk if they store personal information on the home or work computer, bank or shop online or unwittingly provide thieves with “clues” in their social media posts.

A person’s personal consumer data **may already be compromised if** any of the following scenarios occur:

- Unexpected withdrawals from your bank account occur

- Bills or other mail is missing from your mailbox
- New accounts or new credit or debit cards appear that were never requested by the consumer

The Department of Insurance recommends consumers regularly check their credit report and credit scores to ensure the following have not occurred:

- A new account suddenly appears
- Unfamiliar accounts are listed
- Sudden appearance of items with a negative impact (which can often be related to unauthorized accounts or activities)

Farmer went on to say, “Consumers need to be vigilant and contact their insurance companies to ensure those companies are protecting the customer’s personal information against potential security breaches. You should also ask if there are additional steps or safeguards policyholders can take to provide additional security to their accounts and personal information. Consumers should closely monitor their accounts, pay special attention to all correspondence about their policies and be on the lookout for unauthorized withdrawals.”

If you believe your accounts and personal information have been compromised, contact your insurance company immediately. You can also contact the South Carolina Department of Insurance Office of Consumer Services to ask questions or file a [formal complaint](#). You may call 1- 800 -768 – 3467 from 8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. Monday-Thursday and 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Friday. You may also contact the Office via e-mail, [consumers@doi.sc.gov](mailto:consumers@doi.sc.gov).

The Office of the South Carolina Attorney General also encourages consumers to report fraud by calling 1-888-95 FRAUD and visit [www.scag.gov](http://www.scag.gov) for more information.

For more information to help you protect your identity and financial accounts from online criminals the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) provides a [Cybersecurity Checklist](#).