

SCAM LETTERS (419 ADVANCE FEE FRAUD)

Due to the number of Nigerian letters received around the world, it is necessary to make the general public aware of the problem so that they do not become victims of a possible scam. The so-called Nigerian Letter Scam is intrinsically an advance fee fraud. The fraud is also known as the "419 scam" as the fraud is outlined in Section 419 of the Nigerian Criminal Code. A fraudster, usually a member of a criminal syndicate, operates the scheme. (It must be noted, however, that though these scams originated from Nigeria, syndicates of other African countries have become involved in these advance fee fraud scams). For information please see the website of Department of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.dfa.gov.za/consular/scam.htm> Advance Fee Fraud Scam Letters & Lottery Scams

Operation of the scheme

The scam is initiated with the fraudster contacting a targeted company, either by fax, mail or e-mail. A business proposal is made in the letter, fax or via e-mail, usually by a syndicate posing as senior government officials. The fraudsters claim that they are in possession of a large amount of over-budgeted money, usually American dollars. The proposal entails the transfer of the over-budgeted money to a bank account outside of the country where the scam originates, which is that of the targeted company. A plausible explanation is usually given for the transfer. It sounds appealing to the intended victim. The person receiving the letter or fax is generally promised between 20 to 35 percent of the money to be transferred as commission for the use of his/her bank account.

If the intended victim is interested in the deal, they are requested to forward a variety of paperwork which generally includes blank company letterheads which are duly signed, blank invoices, telephone and fax numbers, and especially bank account details, which are required to effect the transfer of the money into the "victim's" bank account.

The money is obtained from the victim in a number of ways, such as:

- Asking the victim to deposit money into a specified bank account to help cover expenses for completing the deal, which may include paying bribes to other parties in the country from where the scam is operated ;
- Once the original fee has been paid, "complications" may arise which necessitate the payment of more fees ;
- Organising a meeting in certain countries and, once the victim is in the said country, his passport is confiscated and he is detained until sufficient payment is received ;
- Using the bank details on official letterheads to transfer money out of the victim's bank account and into an account under the control of the criminals ;
- Once the money is lost, an "official" may contact the victim on the pretext of helping the victim retrieve the lost money, which in turn, also costs money.

Indicators of a possible scam

- The letter will stress the urgency of the matter
- The confidential nature of the transaction is stressed.
- Claims are made that the parties are employed in, or have strong ties with the government or central bank
- There may be need to travel
- Many forged looking documents
- Request for blank letterheads, invoices and banking details
- Additional fees are continuously requested in order to further the transaction
- Most letters will indicate that the transaction is 100% risk-free
- For more information, please refer to the [419 Legal](#)

