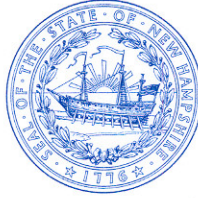


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NH DEPARTMENT OF SECURITIES REGULATION NAMES TOP TEN THREATS TO INVESTORS

Concord, N.H. (March 25, 2005) The New Hampshire Bureau of Securities Regulation today identified the most common ploys being used to cheat investors out of hundreds of millions of dollars. "Investors should keep their guard up anytime anyone offers an investment opportunity. It pays to remember that if an investment sounds too good to be true, it usually is," said Mark Connolly, Bureau Director.

The following ranking of the top 10 threats to investors for 2005 is based on the order of prevalence and seriousness as identified by an annual survey of members of the North American Securities Administrators Association. (NASAA).

1. PONZI SCHEMES

The premise is simple: pay early investors with money raised from later investors. The only people who make money are the promoters who set the Ponzi in motion.

2. UNLICENSED INDIVIDUALS SELLING SECURITIES

Anyone selling securities without a valid *securities* license should be a red alert for investors. Remember: No license, no sale.

3. UNREGISTERED INVESTMENT PRODUCTS

Con artists bypass stringent state registration requirements to pitch viatical settlements, pay telephone and ATM leasing contracts, and other investment contracts with the promise of "limited or no risk" and high returns.

4. PROMISSORY NOTES

Empty promises can leave these notes worth less than the paper on which they are printed.

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5. SENIOR INVESTMENT FRAUD

Because they have built a lifetime of savings, seniors continue to face investment fraud by con artists peddling unsecured promissory notes, viatical settlements and other investments that are either fraudulent or unsuitable for them based on their particular financial needs.

6. HIGH-YIELD INVESTMENTS

Con artists lure investors with promises of triple-digit returns through access to “risk free guaranteed high yield instruments” or something equally deceptive

7. INTERNET FRAUD

Stock promoters are using online “boiler rooms,” instant messaging, and fake websites to lure investors into “pump-and-dump” stock schemes.

8. AFFINITY FRAUD

Con artists are increasingly targeting religious, ethnic, cultural and professional groups.

9. VARIABLE ANNUITY SALES PRACTICES

Senior investors, in particular, should beware of the high surrender fees and steep sales commissions agents often earn when they move investors into variable annuities.

10. OIL & GAS SCAMS With oil prices at record levels and continued Middle East instability, regulators warn that con artists may renew schemes promising quick profits in oil and gas ventures.

Dishonorable Mention

Three investment opportunities also were cited for “dishonorable mention,” including:

- penny stocks
- private placements, and
- investment seminars.

Connolly also urged investors to contact the N.H. Bureau of Securities Regulation if they believe they have been the subject of questionable sales practices or securities fraud.

“One phone call can save a lot of money and heartache,” he said.