

Don't slip up on Olympics scams

The Better Business Bureau is offering tips to help make sure that fans are not caught up in a scam during this year's Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia.

While athletes compete for medals, scammers compete for personal information and credit card numbers, the BBB warns.

"The Olympics bring together the best athletes from around the world in the name of human competition," says Tyler Andrew, CEO of BBB serving Alaska, Oregon and Western Washington. "But such a large event, on the world stage, draws the attention of opportunistic people who will try to leverage the popularity for personal gain."

A few tips for supporting and enjoying the games safely at home include:

• HANG UP THE PHONE. "Official" representatives will not call to ask for donations or offer special merchandise. Therefore, never give out credit card information or Social Security numbers to unsolicited callers.

• BEWARE OF FAKE MERCHANDISE. The primary source for official merchandise is sochi2014.com/en. The BBB suggests that people avoid sites that offer too-good-to-be-true deals as they may simply be gathering data for identity theft purposes.

• BOGUS EMAILS. Large email phishing campaigns utilizing official names and logos are showing up in thousands of inboxes. Never click

on links or download attachments from unexpected emails.

• READ CLOSELY. With 100 countries represented in 15 different sports over two weeks, breaking news and updates will occur continuously. People are advised to be skeptical of sensational headlines or announcements that encourage readers to visit foreign websites.

• FAKE MOBILE APPS. Malicious mobile applications are on the rise and a quick search returns several "Olympics" apps. Be sure to choose only official applications and make sure that privacy settings are strict.

• ONE-RING SCAM. First recognized by Better Business Bureaus on the East Coast, the "One Ring" phone scam is now being reported across the United States.

Here's how it works: Automated dialers blast thousands of random calls to mobile numbers that are gleaned from public listings or obtained from black market dealers, who hustle "sucker lists," but disconnect after one ring.

The scammers count on call recipients to notice the missed calls in call logs and return them out of curiosity.

However, return calls are often directed to expensive international hotlines — sometimes peddling "adult entertainment" that can charge upwards of \$19.95 to connect plus additional costs per minute. Charges typically appear on month-end statements as "premium services."

The illegal process of sneaking unapproved charges

onto phone bills is referred to as "cramming" by the Federal Trade Commission, and is one of the most common consumer complaints in America.

Area codes to be aware of include: 809 (Dominican Republic), 876 (Jamaica), 284 (British Virgin Islands), and 473 (Grenada).

While it is unlikely that recipients will be billed for accepting incoming calls, wireless carriers assume that users accept charges by voluntarily returning calls. BBB reminds consumers to not be dumb with smartphones by returning calls to unfamiliar foreign numbers, regularly checking their wireless statements, and add phone numbers to the National Do Not Call Registry.

• FRAUDULENT BILLS. TouchPoint Networks, an industry leader in unified communications, recently announced that the region's businesses should be aware of fraudulent bills coming from companies posing as telecommunications carriers.

The Department of Consumer Protection has launched an investigation into a company calling itself "UST" or "US Telecom," which has been claiming that the aforementioned invoices were for preventive maintenance on existing telephone systems.

As a result, TouchPoint Networks is warning all of its customers and the business community it serves.

Want to help inform others of efforts to deprive locals of their money, property or safety? Notify authorities, then email the Daily Courier at news@thedailycourier.com, call 541-474-3823 or write P.O. Box 1468, Grants Pass, OR 97528.

