The e-mail message announced breathlessly that I had won a lottery in Spain called “El Gordo” (The Fat One). “Mrs Esther Lodwig,” the “Promotions Director” of “Global Stakes Lottery International” wrote, “We are pleased to inform you of the release, of the long awaited results of the EL GORDO SPANISH GLOBALSTAKE LOTTERY/INTERNATIONAL PROMOTIONS PROGRAMES held on the 18th Jun 2003. You were entered as dependent clients with reference Number: IPL/096685769WP1, and batch number GL/678753-PCQ03. Your name attached to the ticket number: 6453 drew a lucky winning number, which consequently won the sweep take in the second category, in four parts.

You have therefore been approved for a payment of €2,500,000 (TWO MILLION, FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND EUROS) in cash credited to file reference number: IPL/096685769/WP1. This is from a total cash prize of €10,756,820 (TEN MILLION SEVEN HUNDRED AND FIFTY SIX THOUSAND, EIGHT HUNDRED AND TWENTY EUROS) Shared among the international winners in all categories, congratulations!!!” The letter went on to explain that I should call a phone number in the Netherlands (odd, that, no?) to claim my prize.

Now it happens that I have never bought a lottery ticket in my life; I’ve contributed to charitable lotteries by contributing the price of the ticket but refusing to take it (just one of those weird habits of mine). All my friends know this about me, so it wouldn’t make sense for anyone to enter me into a lottery. In addition, it’s illegal for a US resident to participate in a foreign lottery; 18 USC §1301 states in that annoyingly complete way that laws are written (take a deep breath), “Whoever brings into the United States for the purpose of disposing of the same, or knowingly deposits with any express company or other common carrier for carriage, or carries in interstate or foreign commerce any paper, certificate, or instrument purporting to be or to represent a ticket, chance, share, or interest in or dependent upon the event of a lottery, gift enterprise, or similar scheme, offering prizes dependent in whole or in part upon lot or chance, or any advertisement of, or list of the prizes drawn or awarded by means of, any such lottery, gift enterprise, or similar scheme; or, being engaged in the business of procuring for a person in 1 State such a ticket, chance, share, or interest in a lottery, gift, enterprise or similar scheme conducted by another State (unless that business is permitted under an agreement between the States in question or appropriate authorities of those States), knowingly transmits in interstate or foreign commerce information to be used for the purpose of procuring such a ticket, chance, share, or interest; or knowingly takes or receives any such paper, certificate, instrument, advertisement, or list so brought, deposited, or transported, shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than two years, or both.” Whew! So in the USA, even if you did win a foreign lottery, it would be illegal to collect on it.

A quick bit of investigation on GOOGLE revealed that this scam has been circulating for about a year. I’ve listed a number of good resources about it in the links section below, but the essentials are as follows:
Criminals (most of them outside Spain) are circulating bogus claims all over the world that (presumably many) potential victims have won lots of money in the Spanish El Gordo (sometimes misspelled “El Godo”) state lottery.

If the victim does call the phone numbers listed in the e-mail or postal mail messages, they are invariably told that they have to supply a tiny fraction of their “winnings” as a tax (or for some other bogus fee).

Anyone who actually falls for the ploy and sends money is asked for yet more and then more and more until they wise up; some victims have sent many thousands of dollars.

Some poor souls have supplied the criminals with details of their bank account and other private information, allowing their names to be used in identity-theft schemes.

So OLÉ! Let’s fight this, ah, Spanish bull by posting a note in the corporate newsletter (remember, you’re always welcome to use these articles verbatim without having to ask for permission provided you indicate the source and include a link to the Network World Fusion archive site).

For further information:

http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/state/article/0,1299,DRMN_21_2151549,00.html

Advice about Scams (Official El Gordo Web Site) http://www.elgordo.com/serv/scam.asp


United States Code Title 18, Section 1301 (18 USC 1301) http://www4.law.cornell.edu/uscode/18/1301.html

NEW! 18-month online Master of Science in Information Assurance offered by Norwich University; see <http://www3.norwich.edu/msia> for full details.

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