

# El Consumidor Latino

CPB Newsletter  
Vol. 01 Num. 02  
Summer 2009

The Spanish-language Newsletter from the New York State Consumer Protection Board (CPB)

## Scammers Exploiting New Yorkers' Housing Woes

The federal stimulus package and housing assistance programs are injecting money into the economy and helping thousands of people stay in their homes. However, no sooner than these programs were made available, scam artists began looking for ways to exploit consumers by making false promises to secure financing, loans and checks.

"Consumers should be wary of companies and individuals promising to help save your home from foreclosure or reduce your interest rate in exchange for the payment of up-front fees," said Mindy A. Bockstein, Chairperson and Executive Director of the New York State Consumer Protection Board (CPB). The mortgage and foreclosure crisis has given rise to new businesses claiming they can help you qualify for stimulus money or get you on the inside fast track to reduce



**HOUSING SCAMS** Scammers are taking advantage of consumers with housing problems

your mortgage interest rate. "Consumers should know that they do not need to pay up-front fees if they are eligible to receive mortgage modification stimulus assistance. Similarly, if you get an e-mail, letter or phone call offering a stimulus check or loan approval, you should know it is a scam."

In many instances, CPB Chairperson Bockstein

explains, individuals and companies market themselves as a "foreclosure service" or a "foreclosure rescue agency," offering to pay your mortgage and rent your home back to you. They may also collect up-front fees and the homeowner's mortgage payments, but fail to contact the lender. "This scheme frequently involves signing the deed to your

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## Summer, Safety and Scams



**MINDY A. BOCKSTEIN** Chairperson and Executive Director

While school is out for most now that summer is in full gear, safety shouldn't be. Hundreds of thousands of children are brought to hospital emergency rooms each year with injuries sustained as a result of recreational activity on or around playground equipment, pools and beaches. The New York State Consumer

Protection Board (CPB) is empowering parents and caregivers with useful safety information for the summer recreation season. In addition, the Agency is providing consumer information regarding an expansion of the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program to help ensure that qualifying recipients are made aware of and can take full advantage of this program.

In the interest of financial security, this issue of El Consumidor Latino also tackles a scam related to the economic stimulus assistance initiative, as well as highlights key

provisions of a new law proposed by Governor Paterson to provide additional protections for New York State homeowners, tenants and neighborhoods in the wake of the foreclosure crisis.

We look forward to bringing news and useful information to consumers about the State's effort on these and other topics, including a series of resources relating to consumer credit and debt in the next issue of El Consumidor Latino. In the meantime, enjoy a safe and happy summer season. ●

### ARTICLES:

- Economic Stimulus/  
Housing Scams
- WIC Now Accepted at  
Farmers' Markets
- Summer Safety Alerts

## Safety Alert: Playground

Statistics from federal and State Agencies are serving as a reminder to parents, guardians and caregivers to keep their children safe while at the playground. The New York State Consumer Protection Board (CPB) reports that more than 200,000 children nationwide each year are brought to hospital emergency rooms with injuries sustained as a result of recreational activity on or around playground equipment.

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## WIC Checks Now Accepted at Farmers' Market Throughout State

Recent research indicates that the presence of fresh food options in communities may help people eat more fruits and vegetables and maintain a healthy weight. To increase healthy food access, Governor Paterson announced that New York has become the first State in the country to enable mothers and children who participate in the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program to use their benefits at farmers' markets.



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## Summer Safety Alert... continue from page 1

# NYS Consumer Protection Board's Summer Safety Alerts

These figures, compiled by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), also indicate that falls from equipment onto the ground make up the vast majority of these injuries.

To help parents and caregivers provide a safe and fun environment for their children, the CPB promotes these guidelines for playground safety:

- CAREFULLY supervise children on play equipment.
- REMOVE hood and neck drawstrings from all children's outerwear. Never allow children to wear helmets, necklaces, purses, scarves or clothing with drawstrings while playing on playground equipment.
- NEVER allow children to attach ropes, jump ropes, clotheslines or pet leashes to play equipment; children can get entangled and strangle themselves.
- CHECK for spaces that could entrap children, such as openings in guardrails or between ladder rungs; these spaces should measure less than 3.5 inches or more than 9 inches.
- CHECK equipment for any defects, sharp points, edges or defective hardware. Remove or repair any faulty hardware like open "S" hooks or protruding bolt ends, which can be hazardous.
- MAKE sure platforms and ramps have guardrails to prevent falls.
- REMOVE tripping hazards, exposed concrete footings, tree stumps and rocks.
- INSTALL and maintain a shock-absorbing surface around the play equipment.
- MAINTAIN or service play equipment and surfacing regularly to make sure both are in good condition.

For more information on playground safety, visit the CPB's website at

[www.nysconsumer.gov](http://www.nysconsumer.gov).



## Swimming Safety

- NEVER leave a child unattended around a swimming pool or any other body of water. It only takes seconds for a child to drown so keep your eyes on them at all times.
- NEVER swim alone. Whether you are an adult, teenager or child, you should always swim with a "buddy."
- NEVER dive in swimming pools. Most swimming pools are not deep enough for safe diving so encourage children and adults to enter the pool "feet first."
- NEVER drink alcohol if you are going to be swimming. Alcohol slows reaction time and affects balance and judgment.
- NEVER leave pool toys and floats in the pool or pool area which may attract young children to the water.
- NEVER leave furniture or ladders near a fence that would enable a child to enter the swimming pool area unattended.
- HAVE a phone with you whenever possible so that you can call 911 in an emergency.
- LEARN to swim. This is the very best defense against preventing accidental drowning. Parents should look into enrolling their children in swimming lessons. Adults who do not know how to swim should also learn. The American Red Cross has classes for people of any age and swimming ability.
- POST instructions for CPR and calling 911 or your local emergency number in the pool area.
- RECOGNIZE a drowning person when you see one. Many people can confuse someone who is drowning with someone who is splashing around. A person cannot always yell for help so use extra caution and safety while observing children and adults when swimming.

# Economic Stimulus/Housing Scams ... continue from page 1

home over to the scammer," said CPB Chairperson Bockstein. "The con artist may promise to sell your home back to you but this may be very difficult, if not impossible, under the terms of the agreement."

Signing over the deed gives the scammer the power to evict you, raise your rent, sell the house or steal the equity you have built in your home. The consumer will still be responsible for paying the mortgage. Thus, if the scammer stops paying the mortgage, your lender would have the right to foreclose on your home, and the foreclosure would appear on your credit report because transferring the deed does not transfer the mortgage obligation.

To avoid falling victim to scams, the New York State Consumer Protection Board (CPB) urges consumers to follow these steps:



**HOUSING SCAMS** Scammers are taking advantage of consumers with housing problems

- Talk to your bank or loan provider first.
  - Do not pay up-front fees.
  - Ignore unsolicited e-mails, letters and phone calls offering stimulus checks, grants or loan approvals; these are fake.
  - Do not give your personal or financial information to unknown sources.
  - Talk with a housing counselor found through the NYS Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) if you missed payments or cannot make contact with your bank or loan provider. A list of counselors may be found on the DHCR website: [www.dhcr.state.ny.us/programs/foreclosureprevention/counselisting.htm](http://www.dhcr.state.ny.us/programs/foreclosureprevention/counselisting.htm).
  - Contact HOPE NOW for assistance. HOPE NOW is an alliance involving Housing and Urban Development (HUD) approved counseling agents, mortgage companies, investors and other mortgage market participants that provide free foreclosure prevention assistance: [www.hopenow.com](http://www.hopenow.com) or 888-995-4673.
  - Visit the Federal Government's Making Home Affordable website to find out if you are eligible to refinance or modify your mortgage at [www.makinghomeaffordable.gov](http://www.makinghomeaffordable.gov).
  - Visit the Home Ownership page on the CPB's website for further information and resources.
- Consumers looking for more detailed information about the economic stimulus are urged to check New York's economic recovery website at [www.recovery.ny.gov](http://www.recovery.ny.gov) and the CPB's website at [www.nysconsumer.gov](http://www.nysconsumer.gov).

## MORE PROTECTIONS FOR NEW YORK STATE HOMEOWNERS, TENANTS AND NEIGHBORHOODS

Recently, Governor David A. Paterson announced legislation that would build upon a landmark subprime lending reform law enacted last year by providing additional critical protections for New York State homeowners, tenants and neighborhoods in the wake of the foreclosure crisis.

"While we have made great strides in assisting distressed homeowners and in reforming lending laws to prevent predatory lenders from taking advantage of consumers, it is clear that more must be done to protect the hard-working men and women of New York," said Governor Paterson. "We cannot allow homeowners who are simply seeking help to lose their homes to loan modification scams and we cannot allow tenants who live in foreclosed properties to find their leases terminated without reasonable notice."

Among the bill's provisions are:

- Expanding the scope of the early mandatory settlement conference to include borrowers of all home loans and not just those borrowers with subprime loans;
- Requiring plaintiffs in a foreclosure action who obtain a judgment of foreclosure and sale to maintain the foreclosed property; and,
- Preventing brokers who perform distressed property consulting services from accepting up-front fees.

**FRUSTRATED?**

**Billing Disputes - Utility Services - Identity Theft - Product Repair - Recalls - Online Scams**

**The NYS Consumer Protection Board can help!**

*We advocate for and empower NY consumers*

[www.nysconsumer.gov](http://www.nysconsumer.gov)  
**Toll-Free Hotline:**  
**1-800-697-1220**

### Important Contacts

To check if a product has been recalled:  
[www.recalls.gov](http://www.recalls.gov)

To include your phone number on the Do Not Call registry:  
[www.donotcall.gov](http://www.donotcall.gov)  
1-888-382-1222

To order credit reports:  
[www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com)  
1-877-322-8228

To file a consumer complaint:  
[www.nysconsumer.gov](http://www.nysconsumer.gov)  
1-800-697-1220

## Expanding WIC Use to Farmer's Markets... continue from page 1



**EXPANDING WIC USE TO FARMERS' MARKETS** Governor Paterson announced that New York has become the first State in the country to enable mothers and children who participate in the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program to use their benefits at farmers' markets

"There are not enough healthy food options in many urban and rural communities throughout the State and that lack of affordable, nutritious food is hurting the health of New Yorkers," said Governor Paterson. "This program will expand access to healthy food for some of the most vulnerable women, infants and children across the State."

This initiative continues Governor Paterson's efforts to combat childhood obesity. It allows WIC program participants to use their benefits to buy fresh locally-grown produce and goods from farmers' markets throughout the State. WIC is a federal program that provides grants to States for supplemental foods, health care referrals and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding,

and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five (5) who are found to be at nutritional risk. In New York, approximately 520,000 women, infants and children participate in the WIC program every month.

The WIC program enhancement was recommended by The New York State Council on Food Policy, on which the New York State Consumer Protection Board serves, and its implementation is a collaborative effort by the New York State Department of Health, the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, and the Farmers' Market Federation of New York.

This effort complements Governor Paterson's Healthy Food/Healthy Communities Initiative, which uses comprehensive strategies to expand access to fresh, nutritious food in underserved communities, including the creation of a \$10 million State revolving loan fund to help finance the construction of food markets in underserved communities.

For more information about WIC benefits and eligibility, visit:

[www.health.state.ny.us](http://www.health.state.ny.us)



### Helmet head never looked so good.

There are different helmets for different activities.

Each type of helmet is made to protect your head from injuries related to a specific sport.

**Play safe. Wear a helmet.**



U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission  
 CPSC hotline: 800-638-2772  
 and 800-638-8270 (TTY)  
[www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov)

NSN-08-2



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